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ATTITUDES AND ASSUMPTIONS OF CHILDREN'S
MINISTRY EXPERTS CONCERNING
CULTURAL RELEVANCY

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Christopher Lowell Harding
December 2008

UMI Number: 3357582

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ATTITUDES AND ASSUMPTIONS OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRY EXPERTS CONCERNING CULTURAL RELEVANCY

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PREFACE

The faculty and staff of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary have been the guiding support that I needed to accomplish this endeavor. I am thankful for Dr. Brian Richardson, my supervising professor, who pointed the way through the details of research methodology. Thanks also go to Dr. Gary Bredfeldt, who demonstrated enthusiasm for this research concern and encouraged me to pursue it. I also could not have continued in this process if it was not for the comradery of the 07 Cohort and the shared effort to encourage one another.

My gratitude to the First Baptist Church of Lenoir City, Tennessee, is great for their love and support through the entirety of this work. Many members of the church took time to ask how the research was proceeding and to encourage me to finish. They asked specifically how to pray for me and were faithful to undergird me with their fervent prayers. Bryan and Arlene Byler and Sherry LeSueur have been the backbone of my ministry at First Baptist Church, and I am eternally grateful for their faithful service that freed me to accomplish this work. Dr. Cleo Eugene “Jack” Jackson III has been the supportive pastor with whom every staff member hopes to serve, and the pastoral and administrative staff each demonstrated their concern as they too encouraged me to finish.

I am deeply thankful to God for the family and friends with whom God has blessed me. Their prayers, wisdom, and support for me were invaluable. I cannot

imagine accomplishing this task without them. I am especially appreciative of the foundation of faith established for me by grandparents, J. L. and Jane Sivley. Their role in my spiritual growth, journey in ministry, and educational pursuits cannot be overstated.

As I prepared the title page for this dissertation, I felt great frustration that I could not list my wife's name before my own. While the work is mine, Kymberly Blakeney Harding has endured this process by my side as the most faithful and supportive wife God could have given me. She pushed me to continue when discouragement encompassed me, and listened attentively as I rambled through the details of the work and the possible ideas for the research. She has always made me feel as though this were the best paper ever written.

Everyone needs cheerleaders like the ones I have. I am thankful for our children, Jonathan and Sarah, who have cheered for me since Kym and I first told them I was going back to school. Jonathan has been my best bud since he was born, and he has always asked about my school when we talked about his. Every trip to Louisville was covered well in prayer because Sarah asked God to give me a safe trip as she prayed every night before bed for the last three years.

Above all, thank you to Jesus, who took an introverted, day-dreaming kid and saved me from my sin. I hope I am pleasing to Him and glorify Him in all things.

Christopher Lowell Harding

Lenoir City, Tennessee

May 2008

CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH CONCERN

The importance of children and the well being of their childhood may have been described best by Howard Hendricks when he observed, “No basic resource is more critical to the future of the human race than children” (Choun and Lawson 2004, 11). Clearly, children today are in a crumbling culture that needs to be reconstructed, beginning with its moral and spiritual condition (Dobson 1992, 203-28). It is the responsibility of God’s people to lead children through the process of human development as well as spiritual conversion (Choun and Lawson 2004, 18). The depth of this responsibility must be examined to understand the biblical role of parents as well as the role of the church in this crucial process. While nothing could be more essential than the role of a parent in the lives of children, this research will give priority to the role of the church and specifically to the role of the children’s pastor in the lives of children.

The place and priority of the distinct ministry position of the children’s pastor has increased in recent years within the church. Barna’s awakening statistics concerning children’s ministry demonstrate that a higher percentage of people experience conversion to Christ between the ages of 5 and 12 years of age over any other age range grouping (Barna 2003, 34). Perhaps it is this statistic that confirmed and enhanced the efforts of many evangelical churches to reach children with the gospel through more aggressive

means. Barna recounts his own awakening concerning children's ministry:

From the moment I'd accepted Christ at age 25, I'd been seduced into believing the great myth of modern ministry: Adults are where the Kingdom action is. . . . Ministry will always be a difficult and sacrificial journey, but placing children in a more appropriate place in the landscape makes the journey more comprehensible and hopeful. (Barna 2003, 13)

This is not to say that every effort to reach children is successful however well intentioned churches may have been in implementing outreach and discipleship programs. For churches to fulfill the great commission they should recognize the sensitivity of children to spiritual concerns and continue to pursue sincere evangelical opportunities with children.

Equally concerning to churches seeking to reach children are the sociological trends of the current culture. Culture continuously changes, and there is much debate on the degree to which churches should change their methodologies in order to reach both those inside and outside the church. The debate over this cultural shift and how the church responds is often contentious between church leaders which could be seen in Kimball's summary statement: "Some people are just hearing about [postmodernity], and yet others are tired of hearing it" (Kimball 2003, 47). A significant example of this is found with the emergent church movement which has been described as an effort to reach the current postmodern society (Beckwith 2004, 22). In children's ministry, the application of this debate is no less of a concern as churches and their children's pastors strive to be effective in their efforts to reach children for evangelization and discipleship.

Introduction to the Research Problem

Over the last few years, trends in methodology of children's ministry have been

rooted in educational assumptions (Ratcliff 2000, 66). It is not unreasonable to connect much of children's ministry methodology and design with the developmentalist influences of Piaget, Erickson, and Fowler if Ratcliff's observations of a superimposed school culture over church ministry are accurate (Shields and Bredfeldt 2001; Ratcliff 2000, 67).

Some of the methodological approaches to children's ministry are contradictory despite their intentions to reach children with the gospel and to nurture their spiritual development. With these contradictions, it is necessary to examine whether or not most children's ministry experts who are proposing ministry methods are doing so based on their theological presuppositions and educational assumptions. Ratcliff's observations of a school environment within the church give cause for presuppositions and assumptions to be reconsidered in order to find the more effective means of reaching children and preventing "typical school methods and perspectives [which] may produce an overarching, oppressive, rule-centered environment" (Ratcliff 2000, 67).

Understanding the presuppositions and assumptions of recognized children's ministry contributors should provide helpful understanding and subsequent meaning of the methods that leaders propose, especially when ministry methods conflict. Both Reggie Joiner and Ivy Beckwith desire to reach children in the postmodern culture and propose methods to do that, but their methods are significantly different (Beckwith 2004; Stanley, Joiner, and Jones 2004). Joiner has taken the approach to the ministry of reaching children with the gospel through large theatrical productions that reflect the popular culture of children's entertainment (Stanley, Joiner, and Jones 2004, 111). Beckwith, who seems to be critical of such entertainment oriented programming,

promotes discipleship of children through their inclusion in churches' adult worship (Beckwith 2004, 149).

The distinction between the two methodologies described above is most likely a reflection of their theological presuppositions and educational assumptions concerning the biblical and sociological identity of children. When local children's pastors consider adopting or rejecting the many proposed methods they may encounter through books, magazines, journals, conferences, and other means, they need to consider what the presuppositions and assumptions of the contributors are in order to evaluate the potential effectiveness of the suggested method as well as its theological correctness.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this descriptive, phenomenological study was to determine commonalities and differences in the theology of children and the attitudes concerning cultural relevancy of children's ministry experts as determining factors of philosophy and models for ministry with children in local congregations. The descriptive nature of this research did reveal findings that will allow those involved with children's ministry in local congregations to understand the presuppositions and assumptions of the recognized contributors and, in turn, created a greater understanding of the ministry methods that these contributors propose.

Delimitations of the Research

Though there are many individuals involved in children's ministry that could have contributed to this study, the intent was to determine the theology and attitudes of those who have made recognized contributions to the development of children's ministry

within the last ten years and continue to do so through conferences, popular or scholarly publications, and other types of media materials that are utilized for training and promoting children's ministry. Accordingly, the attitudes of senior pastors or other staff were not sought unless they had made similar, prior contributions. While denominational affiliation was not a specific concern for this study, the attitudes of non-evangelical leaders were not sought due to the theological distinctions concerning childhood confirmation instead of childhood conversion or a born again experience.

Specific ministry models of large children's ministries were not the concern of this study because the intent is to determine commonalities and differences in the theology and attitudes of leaders in children's ministry. Details of how the population performs ministry to children were also not the concern of this study with the exception of where those details provided further insight into the attitudes of the population.

Research Questions

Upon an examination of the information collected through extensive interviews with leaders in children's ministry as well as a content analysis of their recognized contributions, answers to the following research questions were sought:

1. What are the dominant attitudes towards the role of cultural relevancy in children's ministry of recognized, evangelical contributors to children's ministry?
2. What are the dominant theological presuppositions concerning children and children's ministry of those that have made recognized contributions to this field?
3. What are the themes common to the theology and the attitudes expressed by the contributing leaders towards cultural relevancy as a determining factor in children's ministry methodology?

4. Which, if any, classical ministry methods for children are considered by the contributors to be ineffective due to their lack of cultural relevance for a postmodern culture?
5. Which, if any, postmodern ministry methods for children are considered by the contributors to be ineffective due to their lack of biblical correctness or developmental appropriateness?

Definition of the Population

The population for this study were children's ministry experts. Children's ministry experts are those individuals that have made recognized contributions to children's ministry within the last ten years and continue to do so in evangelical churches and denominations within the United States.

Description of the Research Sample

The population was criterion based because of the level of expertise and influence sought for this study. The minimum number of participants to be interviewed needed to be at least 10, and the maximum number of participants to be interviewed was limited to 25 (Leedy and Ormrod 2001, 153). The total number of contributors that participated in the study was 16, and they were divided into two groups. The first group of 11 contributors were interviewed by telephone, but the second group of 5 additional contributors were interviewed in person by the researcher. The same recording and transcription process was utilized for both groups of interviews.

As specified previously, a significant descriptor of the population is the term *recognized contribution*. This qualifier was intended to be understood as a contribution by children's ministry experts in the form of a book, whether academic or popular, journal articles, media productions, or conference instruction concerning children's

ministry. Those individuals who have made these recognized contributions conceivably shape the overall picture of children's ministry which is then implemented through the local congregations across the country. These persons must have made their contributions to children's ministry within the last ten years and continue to make such contributions through a variety of means.

Delimitations of the Sample

The small size of the sample for this study sharply restricts the possible parameters. Many individuals that may otherwise provide important insight into children's ministry such as local children's pastors, directors, and volunteers were not interviewed for this study unless they made recognized contributions to children's ministry in such a way that influenced the field.

Limitations of Generalizations

Because of the nature of this qualitative study and criterion based sample, the researcher recognizes the limited basis on which generalizations can be made based on the research findings. The findings do not necessarily apply to children's leaders within local church settings or other staff members as well.

Methodological Design

The information for this study was collected in two stages. The first stage consisted of interviews with leaders of children's ministry who have made recognized contributions to their field. Second, a content analysis was done of the transcripts of the completed interviews. The interviews conducted consisted of questions from five issues

which were derived from the precedent literature and were designed to reveal attitudes towards cultural relevancy in children's ministry. Each person in the sample group was contacted by letter either electronically or by mail according to the availability of contact information and then by telephone to request an interview and to schedule the interview at a time that was convenient for the interviewee. The first group of interviews with contributors to children's ministry were conducted by telephone, and each interview lasted between thirty minutes and one hour. The second group of interviews were conducted in person with additional contributors to children's ministry and were similar in duration to those in the first group of interviews. All interviews were recorded by the researcher with the permission of the contributor and then transcribed for further analysis.

The second stage of the information collection consisted of a content analysis to determine what themes appear to be in common or in disagreement among the leaders interviewed. The transcribed interviews were analyzed through emergent coding upon the initial review of the information collected. Upon completion of the analysis, extrapolations were made from the frequency of the categories observed as well as from the interviews as a whole. The information taken from the content analysis was utilized in conjunction with the interviews and the researcher's impressions of those interviews to describe the theological presuppositions and educational assumptions of the contributors to children's ministry.

Instrumentation

For the purpose of this study there were two forms of instrumentation. To accomplish the first stage consisting of interviews, the researcher developed a survey

consisting of interview questions that were intended to reveal the attitudes of children's leaders concerning cultural relevancy in the following areas:

1. Personal calling of the contributors to children's ministry
2. Formal and informal education and training in children's ministry
3. Theology of children
4. Philosophy of children's ministry
5. Developmental appropriateness for introducing biblical concepts
6. Role of cultural relevancy in children's ministry
7. Role of religious traditions in children's ministry
8. Understanding of the cultural transition to postmodernism

These categories and the questions themselves were developed based on the information gleaned from the precedent literature. For example, the interview questions designed by Cannell were helpful in the continued development process of questions for the interview of recognized contributors to children's ministry although her questions were intended for the local church context (Cannell 2001). Additionally helpful were the rhetorical questions Cannell and May proposed as a reflection of what children's ministers were considering as they strove to reach children for Christ (Cannell and May 2000, 47). Surveys previously designed for similar research concerns were also utilized as guides for the survey's development (Ramsey 2003; Van Galder 2003).

Upon completion of the interviews and their transcription, coding for the content analysis was done by the researcher, followed by a comparative analysis of the categorical consistencies or inconsistencies. Qualitative analysis software was utilized to manage the coding process and subsequent analysis. To ensure greater reliability, an

expert panel was formed in order to review the interview questions before the interviews were conducted.

Terminology

The terminology for this research is briefly addressed here. While many of these terms have a broader application, they are defined as they apply to children's ministry both on a national level and within the context of local congregations. Further detail has been provided concerning these terms within the context of the precedent literature in the next chapter.

Culture. The characteristics, rules, values, and beliefs of a particular social group which may be identified by any number of commonalities such as ethnicity, language, gender, age, etc. McLaren defines culture in terms of "a consistent and meaningful reality through the overarching organization of rituals and symbol systems" and applies this definition particularly to his examination of culture within the classroom (McLaren 1993, 5).

Cultural relevancy. For the purpose of this research, this term refers to the need to communicate truth through methods that are understandable and meaningful to the target audience. It is not to be confused with concerns for cultural diversity or pluralism, but rather to communicate with an awareness of unique distinctives within a given culture, in this case children. As Sullivan explains the concept, "If something makes sense, it is culturally relevant. A lack of cultural relevancy can result in a person feeling like they are out of their element and do not know the rules or expectations" (Sullivan 2003).

Developmentalism. The broad educational assumption that individuals grow and mature through a series of stages or processes that can be identified through scientific observation. This encompasses the cognitive, emotional, moral, and spiritual growth of individuals (Joy 1986, 17). Each of these areas of development have significant theorists and proponents that have influenced educational thought.

Postmodernity. This is the identified shift in the current culture which has been marked by a relativistic understanding of truth and a tendency to question absolute truth. This is also accompanied by a rejection of religious traditions in exchange for a desire for deeper spirituality (Kimball 2003, 41). Johnston actually warns that “postmodernism is better understood descriptively and by its features, rather than by definition” (Johnston 2001, 24).

Theological presuppositions. These are basic statements of someone’s understanding of theology, and identification of theological presuppositions is helpful to understand the perspective others when involved in theological discourse (Erickson 2001, 19). For this study, attention will be given to the theological presuppositions about children and children’s ministry.

Classical children’s ministry. This is a broad concept identified by the researcher that encompasses many children’s ministry methods. It will be used in this paper to describe methods of reaching and ministering to children that were widely implemented in the church over the last several years and are revered for their longevity but not necessarily for their effectiveness.

Evangelical. This is the descriptor indicating those children’s ministry leaders that hold to the “basic tenets of the faith and a missionary outreach of compassion and

urgency” which includes but a high regard for the Bible as inerrant, total depravity of man, salvation through Christ alone, and the return of Christ (Elwell 1984, 379-80).

Though not restricted to certain denominations, evangelical leaders are those that proclaim the redemptive message of Christ, the subsequent need for conversion, and hold a high view of the Bible as the inspired, infallible word of God (Elwell 1984, 379-80).

Non-evangelical. Not all individuals or denominations considering themselves to be Christians would also consider themselves to be *evangelical*. In contrast to evangelicals, non-evangelicals may recognize the work of Christ, but they emphasize a confirmation process rather than a personal conversion experience.

Conversionist. Conversionists are those children’s ministry leaders that emphasize the need for a born again experience in the lives of children that have reached an understanding and conviction of their own spiritual condition and need for Christ (Estep 2002).

Research Assumptions

This research problem was investigated based on the following assumptions concerning children’s ministry, children’s pastors, and recognized contributors to children’s ministry:

1. That children’s ministry contributors are aware of the cultural shift towards postmodernism and that there is a need to adjust ministry methods accordingly, however they may determine what those adjustments are.
2. That children’s pastors, directors, and volunteers are influenced to some degree by the many books, journals, conferences, and other forms of training and education produced by contributors to children’s ministry.

3. That most children's ministry contributors have a passionate desire to see children's ministry methods improve in their effectiveness to further the spiritual growth of children and assist the leadership efforts of local children's ministry pastors, directors, and laymen.

CHAPTER 2

PRECEDENT LITERATURE

To continue to develop a better understanding of the possible theological presuppositions and educational assumptions of significant contributors to children's ministry, a thorough survey of the available contributions to children's ministry already written should be considered. Contributors to children's ministry have included a wide range of topics from parenting helps to classroom management to works of theology. For the purpose of this research the literature review will focus on theological, sociological, and educational works that are directly applicable to children's ministry on a national level, children's ministry in the local congregation, and those who have committed themselves to serving in this ministry field.

To be precise, theology, sociology, and culture blend together as aspects of God's truth, but they must be addressed distinctly and in proper order unlike some authors that base their theology on human development theory instead of doctrinal truth (Cully 1983, 201). Hendricks expresses great concern in determining the appropriate relationship between science and faith and expresses his position by saying, "We could by conscientious and intentional study and reflection, determine how developmental psychology and conversionist theology can correlate" (William Hendricks 1980, 251). Essentially, psychology and theology can benefit one another in that theology completes

the insufficient view of man while psychology offers insight into how to present theological concepts at developmentally appropriate ages (Shields and Bredfeldt 2001, 49).

Evangelizing and Spiritually Nurturing Children in the Bible

It is essential to have a correct theological understanding of children and children's ministry as a basis for obtaining the goals of evangelism and discipleship. While children are not part of the creation account, they are soon to arrive in the early chapters of Genesis as God commands Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:27-28). In this regard, children are an essential part of God's plan with humanity. The more desired status of children in the Bible actually functions as a cultural anomaly within the remainder of the ancient world which viewed children with far less value, leaving them vulnerable even to the point of infanticide (Gundry-Volf 2001, 31-34).

Children are used by God to remind parents of God's essence as Creator of life as each child is a reflection of God's divine accomplishments (Cully 1983, 201). May et al. affirm this important aspect of children, and also acknowledge the joy they bring as they describe the significance of children as blessings from God (May et al. 2005, 26-28). They summarize many of the biblical passages where children are identified as blessings, and they conclude, "Biblical authors consistently affirm that mothers, fathers, and grandparents find joy in children. God blesses us through children" (May et al. 2005, 28).

The general consensus concerning the importance of children biblically, congregationally, and personally is reasonably evident in the available literature. As

Bunge remarks, “Broad public concern for children and heightened recognition of the tremendous challenges they face are unmistakable” (Bunge 2001, 1). Children are important to God and to humanity. Even with this consensus, further consideration must be given to understand why children are considered important within the precedent literature and specifically to discover the evidence gleamed from both specific and general revelation respectively.

Spiritual Education in the Old Testament

The literature concerning children in Jewish culture is consistent in that children were highly valued, particularly in comparison to surrounding societies of the day. Barclay argues, “It would not be wrong to say that for the Jew the child was the most important person in the community” (Barclay 1959, 11). Gundry-Wolf’s survey of Old Testament references to children contributes an essential perspective of their value:

Children are, more fundamentally, a divine gift and sign of God’s blessing, in accordance with the very blessing of the Creator upon humanity in primal history: “Male and female he created them. God blessed them and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth . . . !’” (Gen. 1:27-28). Abundant children were a blessing and a great source of joy (Pss. 127:3-5; 128:3-6), as well as hope of life after death (through one’s descendants: see Gen. 48:16; 2 Sam. 18:18). Childlessness was wretched, and unusual measures were taken to overcome it (Gen. 10:1-22; 1 Sam. 1; Deut. 25:5-10; cf. Mark 12: 19-23). Children were, notably, a central feature of God’s promise to Abraham to bless him and make him “a great nation” by giving him descendants as innumerable as the dust of the earth and the stars in the heavens (Gen. 12:2; 13:16; 15:5) . . . Children were thus members of God’s covenant with Israel – in rabbinic teaching, even those still in the womb – and it was expected that they would assume covenantal responsibilities. (Grundry-Wolf 2001, 35)

With the arrival of these divine blessings, biblical directives concerning the need for the nurturing of children in the Old Testament were an essential aspect of spiritual education. To be specific, “Jewish education was not entirely religious

education. There was no text-book except the Scriptures; all primary education was preparation for the reading of the Law; and all higher education was the reading and study of it" (Barclay 1959, 13). Several examples are given in the Scriptures of positive and negative child rearing stories, but the heart of nurturing children in the Old Testament is found in the *Shema*. The need to communicate encounters with God and His law to the next generations is stated in Deuteronomy 11:15, "It was not your children who saw what he [the Lord] did for you in the desert until you arrived at this place" (Richards 1988, 23). This truth and these experiences must be communicated, and it is the parents of the Hebrew children who are commanded to do so. Child-rearing centers around the development of a child's understanding of the whole law as handed down by Moses to the Israelites (Merrill 1994, 166-67). Carlson and Crupper also recognize the Old Testament's emphasis on the spiritual development of children (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 113-14). Based on their observations, they identify thirteen principles which include:

1. Children's nature in the Old Testament could be described as bearing the marks of *Imago Dei* and yet possess a fallen nature.
2. Adults, and most specifically parents, are responsible to be directive in shaping the spiritual lives of children they influence.
3. Children are capable of normal spiritual disciplines like prayer, understanding the Scriptures, worship, praise, and service.
4. The role of the teacher is to prompt the next generation to have the law of the Lord on their hearts and lips.
5. Another role of the teacher is to model having the words of the Lord on their own heart, then ensuring that they are taught through a variety of means.
6. The predominant mode of instruction to the child is via the family in the Old Testament.

7. Specific teaching of the Scriptures occurred in every era after it was written.
8. We cannot assume that a child's nature is "innocent" when the Bible indicates that even young children are capable of sin.
9. The eternal state of young children seems to be that they go to heaven, should they die.
10. Children are important in the public honoring of God.
11. Jeremiah's call to ministry speaks of the early training to have children know how to interact with the word from the Lord.
12. Children can be expected to obey the truth of God.
13. God's Spirit must quicken the words of his truth if families and children are to be restored from the heart.

In Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Israel is called to love the Lord and to know the commandments by teaching them to their children through everyday activities. Merrill likens this discipleship process to a sculptor carving the law into a wall of rock and while "the sheer labor of such a task is daunting indeed, but once done, the message is there to stay" (Merrill 1994, 167). The application of this discipleship process was intended to be natural. Others have described it as a "nonformal process" or in other words, "When we recite God's commandments to our children and talk with them about God in the flow of everyday life . . . when we tell our children the story of God at work throughout history and in our lives, it is hard to forget God. Teaching the faith to children, strengthens the faith of adults" (May et al. 2005, 35).

The dichotomy of the command to communicate the nature of God and His law as well as the history of the Israelites' interaction with Him could have important implications for the contemporary church and for parents. First, it is the responsibility of the congregation, whether the nation of Israel or the local church, to communicate the law

of God and God's directive to teach it to children as a natural part of life. Second, parents are charged with the specific responsibility of teaching these truths to their children through every aspect of daily life.

Parental Implications of Biblical Instruction

The teaching of God's Law to children in Bible times was the responsibility of parents. The father is identified as the one to be the primary teacher with the support of the mother, and it was specifically the father's responsibility to provide for the spiritual and physical growth of his children (Zuck 1996, 107 and 128; Genesis 18:19 and Numbers 1:4). Barclay also affirms the priority of the father's responsibility in teaching the Law and describes the modes of teaching as occurring through both the agrarian lifestyles and the feasts celebrated by Israel, including the Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Barclay 1959, 15-19). The Schema was the heart of biblical instruction and the teaching of the love of God to be passed on by fathers to their children, even reciting it on a daily basis (Cousins 1986, 263). Perhaps it is more curious to today's culture that in the Old Testament there is no formal, separate institution such as a school established for the development of children (Richards 1988, 20). As Richards describes, "To live as a member of the chosen people and participate in their life in the historic land was to live among constant reminders of God and His commitment to His covenant people" (Richards 1988, 22). The actual educational structure of Israel was woven throughout their lives, in their yearly calendar, their institutions, and their memorials (Richards 1988, 21-22). Zuck also identifies the responsibility of spiritual nurturing as the eleventh instruction to parents given by God in the Bible (Zuck 1996,

129). Concepts to be taught include God's actions, God's commands, God's character, fearing God, and Godly conduct (Zuck 1996, 128).

Richards provides a beneficial table which summarizes ministering to children according to the ideal of the Mosaic law (Richards 1988, 25). The first of the three concepts of nurturing children is to model the lifestyle of faith as in a loving and holy community according to the Mosaic ideal. The second concept for nurturing children is the child's participation with adults in experiences of faith such as worship, symbolism, and events that "teach about God and faith relationship with Him" (Richards 1988, 25). Third is the concept of instruction where teaching is woven into daily experiences by parents that love and know God and His law (Richards 1988, 25). As Joy observes, "Such education was comprehensive in scope and made virtually all of life a school" (Joy 1986, 7). Zuck is in agreement with Richards on the concept of modeling in the Old Testament for the spiritual nurturing of children. He describes the process as he writes, "Before parents can teach their children to love the Lord and know the Word (Deut. 6:7; 11:19), they themselves need to set the example by loving Him and having His Word in their hearts (6:5-6; 11:18; 32:32:46)" (Zuck 1996, 115). Edersheim's summary of the place of children in the Old Testament and the importance of modeling Godly behavior also is similar as he describes:

Education . . . is imparted by influence and example, before it comes by teaching; it is acquired by what is seen and heard, before it is laboriously learned from books; its real object becomes instinctively felt., before its goal is consciously sought. What Jewish fathers and mothers were; what they felt towards their children; and with what reverence, affection and care the latter returned what they received, is known to every reader of the Old Testament. The relationship of father has its highest sanction and embodiment in that of God towards Israel; the tenderness and care of a mother in that of the watchfulness and pity of the Lord over His people. The semi-Divine relationship between children and parents appears in the location, the far

more than outward duties which it implies in the wording, of the Fifth Commandment. No punishment more prompt than that of its breach; no description more terribly realistic than that of the vengeance which overtakes such sin. (Edersheim, 227)

Spiritual Education in the New Testament

The spiritual education of children in the New Testament begins with the tenderness of Jesus welcoming children, elevating their social status, and sternly warning of the terrible fate to all those that might seek to harm children (Mark 10:16, Mark 9:36-37, and Matthew 18:5-6), (Joy 1986, 8-9). Zuck summarizes the truth to be gleaned from these encounters between children and Jesus when he says:

These several encounters of our Savior with children, even very young children, demonstrate that the young, being precious in God's sight, are to be loved, appreciated, blessed, prayed for, welcomed, and protected. Adults are to become like children and are to learn from them. Heaven will be populated with children and with adults who have become childlike in their loving response to the Savior. (Zuck 1996, 216)

Gundry-Volf postulates the significance of children and their relationship with Jesus by describing what may be gleaned from their encounters with him in the Gospels (Gundry-Volf 2001, 29-60). The first of these observations is that children may be seen as recipients of God's coming reign, citing Mark 10:13-16, Matthew 19:13-15, and Luke 18:15-17 (Gundry-Volf 2001, 37). Second, children should be recognized as models of how one may enter the reign of God (Gundry-Volf 2001, 38). Third, adults are to emulate the humility of children which may be a reference to their sociological status in the first century (Gundry-Volf 2001, 40-41). Fourth, serving children is an act that reflects greatness, and Jesus' teaching on this, that men should receive children, was a definitive departure from the general cultural perception of the lowly position of children

(Gundry-Volf 2001, 44). Fifth, for adults to be welcoming and receptive to children they are also welcoming Jesus to the degree that “the child represents Jesus as a humble, suffering figure.” (Gundry-Volf 2001, 44) Lastly, it could be inferred from Jesus’ encounters with children that they have an awareness or knowledge of who Jesus is in essence as they are seen praising him as the Son of David (Gundry-Volf 2001, 47).

Conflicting Interpretations from the Gospel of Mark

While some authors have drawn both parallels and contradictions between Mark chapter 10 and the household passages found in the Epistles, neither are necessarily accurate if Mark chapter 10 is more focused on discipleship (Brooks 1991, 159). Additionally, Mark 9:36-37 and Mark 10: 13-16 are instructive more towards the need for believers to receive persons of humble status and for appropriate behavior for disciples respectively (Brooks 1991, 159). Brooks further observations of this passage provides another interesting perspective of this encounter between children and Jesus when he says, “The ultimate focus of the passage is not only on the attitude with which one comes to Jesus but on *coming to Jesus*, the object of one’s faith” (Brooks 1991, 160; italics original). Likewise, Short notes the significance of receiving the child in his humble position because “. . . this service in their regard would be divinely evaluated as though done to Jesus Himself . . .” (Short 1986, 1169).

Joyce Mercer’s *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* approaches the Gospel of Mark from both feminist and liberation theology perspectives in contrast to that of Brooks (Mercer 2005). As she describes children in Mark:

Children in Mark have a primary role in moving the story along to its highly unusual

and surprising ending. In short, children become a primary means for Mark to tell his version of the story of Jesus with its good news of God's grace. It seems likely that we might find clues in such a story for a liberation theology of children. (Mercer 2005, 44)

Mercer's concern and focus on Mark's Gospel as a means to understanding a theology of children is based on her view of Mark as a commentary on the struggles of oppressed social groups in the first century (Mercer 2005, 46).

Of particular interest here are her comments about Mark 9:33-42 and 10:13-16. Mercer argues that Mark 9:33-42 is not a simple and tender event where Jesus receives children, but a strong contrast to the harshness of the adult world, which often lacks humility and hospitality (Mercer 2005, 50-51). Specifically, she connects this encounter between children and Jesus to the Old Testament call for hospitality to strangers where “. . . the God who brought Child Israel out of Egypt in care (Hosea 11:1-4) protects the orphans, so the failure to receive them with hospitality is tantamount to turning one's back on God, who similarly provided hospitality to Israel” (Mercer 2005, 51). Mark 10:13-16 is interpreted even more distinctly as Mercer rejects any understanding of this passage as insight to how one should receive Christ. Instead she sees the passage as a call to accept all persons of the lowest social status, freeing them from otherwise oppressive hierarchies found both in the society at large or even in the infancy of the church (Mercer 2005, 53).

References to Children in the Epistles

Past the gospels and their intimate portrayal of Jesus and children, very little is said of children in the remainder of the New Testament (Joy 1982, 9; Richards 1988, 37). Of the passages in the Epistles that do speak to children, their parents, and their spiritual

formation, they seem to be prescriptive in nature. The passages also are contested concerning their interpretation particularly in their relationship to Jesus' teaching in the Gospels. Passages such as Colossians 3:20-21 and Ephesians 6:1-4 prescribe the relationship mechanics for parents and children, but some have interpreted these directives as in contradiction with Jesus' status elevating portrayal of children in the Gospels (Devries 2001, 166).

While these verses expect an authoritative parental relationship, it is not necessary to assume that they contradict the Gospels. George E. Harpur proposes a more balanced understanding when he says, "Children need discipline and admonition when combined with gentle understanding of their needs and limitations" (Harpur 1986, 1438). Gundyr-Volf demonstrates that these epistle passages on children do not contradict the Gospel encounters but complete the need for children to mature fully and develop a submissive Christian faith within the loving, Christian community (Gundry-Volf 2001, 55). The child's place in the Christian community is also emphasized in the Ephesians and Colossians accounts as Paul addresses children specifically, assuming they would be in the midst of the congregation when the Epistles were read (Wood 1978, 80; Vaughan 1978, 314). Such an inclusion also is further evidence of the higher social value of children within the first century Christian community as compared to the pagan world of the Greeks and the Romans (Wood 1978, 80). Colossians 3:20-21 reflects the reciprocity of the parent-child relationship as children are to obey their parents which pleases God, but fathers are not to abuse their authority with severe expectations (Vaughan 1978, 218-19).

Because of the relatively limited number of biblical directives concerning children and obedience, discovering the means for spiritual education of children in the New Testament may be extrapolated from further consideration of the biblical, social, and historical contexts of the fledgling New Testament church and the early patristic churches (Joy 1982, 9; Richards 1988, 37-46). Richards concludes that the early church looked to the Old Testament principles of child rearing as seen in the *Shema* with the distinction that the church took the place of the nation of Israel as a whole (Richards 1988, 40). Joy concurs when he states, “Both [Jesus] and the New Testament writers affirm that the new fellowship of faith is the successor to the old line of Abraham” (Joy 1982, 13). While Richards and Joy emphasize the need for children to receive biblical instruction, their views concerning the relationship between Israel and the Church and their respective covenants with God are dispensational and do not reflect the views of all premillennialists (Erickson 2001, 342 and 397).

Historic Attitudes towards Children’s Ministry

As the early church increased in number and grew in maturity, believers continued to reflect the Jewish understanding and appreciation of children, their importance to God, and their need for both physical and spiritual nurturing. The influence of Christian theology and the understanding of the place of the child in the church are closely connected and can be seen throughout the development of church history from Augustine’s teachings on original sin to the progressive, child-centric approach of modern liberation and feminist theology. The focus of this research does not allow for an extensive exploration of each of the significant theologians whose writings

have provided guidance for the church's ministry to children, but a brief consideration of the common threads of thought concerning children from church history will provide helpful insight into current perceptions of theology and children ministry.

The Child in Christian Thought offers a broad historical perspective of spiritual education for the child as the various contributors examine some of the more influential theologians of church history and their approach to nurturing children (Bunge 2001). These theologians, while not in complete agreement with one another, reflect the church's efforts to see children right with God and fully matured to be faithful and effective contributors of the church, but the spiritual education of children is more the responsibility of parents who are to firmly, but lovingly raise children in the faith and doctrine of the church.

This concern for children increased particularly during the Reformation as "Luther, Melanchthon, Sturm, Bucer, Zwingli, and Calvin were united in their commitment to the teaching ministry of the family and to the establishment of educational institutions that would enhance literacy and form a cadre of leaders with sufficient education to guide both church and society" (Osmer 2000, 508). Other church leaders such as John Wesley continued this concern for children and their education and upbringing and emphasized exceptionally austere yet loving parenting and teaching methods (Estep 1997).

The Puritans also emulated similar concern for children and their need for spiritual direction and conversion to Christ. In the Puritan tradition there was significant concern for the spiritual well being of children but that concern was likely a result of their lack of distinction between child and adult (Fleming 1933, 59-60). In great distinction,

Bushnell contradicted his contemporary Puritans and Revivalists with his writings which de-emphasized the sin nature of the child and a subsequent need for conversion but contrarily prompted Christian parents to raise children without ever seeing themselves as anything but Christian (Bushnell 1861; Mulder 1979).

Such a summary statement is intended in no way to encapsulate the vastness and complexity of the theological perspectives concerning children of the more significant theologians of church history, but it does summarize an essential common theme that children in the church must be spiritually nurtured by both the church and the home but with emphasis on the latter. Modern and perhaps postmodern theology has taken a more reactionary approach to the more traditional views of children and the church. This approach toward childhood theology developed into a system better described as “an advocacy theology” of children (Jansen 2005, xiii).

With the development of liberation and feminist theology and the emphasis on the oppressed therein, much attention has been given to a possible connection between increases in physical child abuse and the historic teaching of the church to properly discipline children. Joyce Mercer’s *What Child Is This?* thoroughly describes the feminist disagreement and subsequent concerns with historic theological themes towards children (Mercer 2005). As she describes the feminist criticism of traditional, historic Christian theology and contemporary evangelicals’ application of it:

Throughout the centuries, other Christian theologians have paid relatively little attention to children, in part because the notion of children as a particular form of human life separate from infancy and adulthood is a modern idea. . . . Even when theologians wrote about children, they usually did so in the form of attention to another issue. For example, several theologians – including Augustine and Calvin use the situation of unbaptized infants as a sort of case study for working out their soteriology, the doctrine of divine salvation of human persons. . . . A key part of this

theological work [historical retrieval] on children consists in feminist critical writings implicating Christian theology in the abuse of children. . . . At the same time the academy raises up voices critical of Christian theology's complicity with child maltreatment, a contrasting voice identified with the evangelical religious and political right represents a diverse collection of groups who have successfully coalesced around a purported 'pro-family' stance. . . . Here the focus of critique turns to the evils of popular culture, parent's lack of adequate religious piety, and, most importantly, the problematic 'nature' of children as manifestations of flawed and fallen humanity." (Mercer 2005, 121)

The connection between Christian theology and child abuse is reflective of the rejection of concepts such as original sin and personal conversion to Christ by feminist theologians who find such concepts to be oppressive, but Bunge's historical summary of Christian thought and the child offers a definitive argument that no such connect should be suggested (Bunge 2001). Her observations are quite prudent:

Any judgements about the effect of the idea of original sin on the treatment of children must be made cautiously and always within the context of a thinker's larger philosophical, theological, cultural, and historical framework. Although some Christians who regard children as sinful have severely punished them, viewing children as sinful does not necessarily lead to the harsh treatment of children, and it is not always either the only or even the largest obstacle to their humane treatment. (Bunge 2001, 16)

Perspectives on Childhood Conversion

For the evangelical children's ministry leader, childhood conversion should be the pivotal theological concern to be considered when developing theological presuppositions and educational assumptions concerning children's ministry. For the sake of this research, the author will utilize the term *conversionist*, as may be seen in much of the literature, as one who believes in the need for a conversion experience in which a child confesses his or her need for and belief in Christ and asks Christ to forgive his or her sins (Estep 2002). The term *developmentalist* refers more to those who do not

acknowledge the need for a specific conversion experience but do see children's faith developing in slower, more gradual stages (Hayes 1986, 400). It should not be presumed that these two positions are exclusive of the other, but the terms do define the argument.

Much has been written concerning childhood spiritual conversion and nurturing. Within the conversionist perspective there are a variety of proponents as well as differing beliefs and nuances as to the particulars of childhood conversion such as age of accountability and methodologies for evangelizing children (Estep 2002, 186; Hayes 1986, 408-09). Developmentalism has served as the antithesis of the concept of childhood conversion because of the view of stages of growth in contrast to a moment of change when a child trusts Christ as Savior (Estep 2002, 187; Hayes 1986, 410). Estep identifies Horace Bushnell and John Dewey as highly influential in the argument against conversion theology because of their perspective of process conversion and process education respectively (Estep 2002, 186). The desire to encourage a conversion experience in a child but also allowing for developmental stages creates uncertainty for parents and some pastors (Chapman 1986, 215). Hayes also notes the conundrum associated with the insight into child development provided by psychology while simultaneously creating confusion with the issue of conversion:

In recent years, the significant character development research of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg have added new dimensions to the issue of child conversion. How do the social and psychological theories of informal human development relate to religious conversion? The answers are not simple but at least an approach to a solution is needed. (Hayes 1986, 410)

Specific tension between developmental theorists and evangelicalism can be seen in conversionist theology. Sharp distinctions between the two concepts may be too problematic for some church leaders to accept (Hendricks 1978, 66). While

psychological insight is helpful to understand the child's development, it also creates confusion because of the lack of recognition of the individual's need for a conversion experience (Hayes 1986, 400). Development theory is helpful because it provides "insight into what might be called normal human development" but certainly does not acknowledge the evangelical position of spiritual change (Hayes 1986, 400).

Additionally, the convergence of developmentalism and biblical principles has caused "skepticism toward some evangelical tactics with the very young" (Hayes 1986, 400). Westerhoff's approach may be less problematic as he recognizes the necessity of both conversion and nurturing in the life of a child (Westerhoff 1976). From his perspective, the issue of conversion to faith and nurturing towards faith are both necessary as he suggests, "Conversion, however, is never an isolated event devoid of all elements of nurture. Nurture and conversion are a unified whole. Neither those who nurture persons into church membership nor those who nurture persons into the acceptance of the church's dogma have taken seriously the relationship between nurture and conversion" (Westerhoff 1976, 39-40).

Estep's descriptors. To assist in the clarity of the conversionist perspectives, Estep's descriptive table of contributors and their theological and methodological perspectives are displayed below. (Estep 2002, 186-87)

Spiritual Nurturing in Contemporary Culture

While the biblical principles of nurturing faith in children are evident in both the Old and New Testaments, the contemporary application of those principles may be less certain for both parents and church leaders. Though today's culture has changed, the

Table 1. Estep's summary of conversionist perspectives

<i>Contributor</i>	<i>Description</i>
Revivalist	Children are viewed as totally depraved, sinful from birth, and can only be saved by a Spirit-given conversion experience. This approach is typical of fundamentalist traditions (e.g., New England Calvinists of the 19 th Century).
Horace Bushnell	Children can be nurtured into the Christian faith, particularly by the example and instruction of Christian parents in the context of the Christian family. This approach was most influential in the mainline Protestant denominations as a reaction against Revivalist approach.
Child Conversion	Children are in need of salvation and can respond to the gospel as early as toddler age, and hence should be actively evangelized. This approach is widely held by evangelical traditions.
John Inchley	Children are born innocent until the age of accountability, at which time they must make a decision to accept Christ as Savior and Lord.
Ronald Goldman	Children are incapable of understanding Bible or Theology until formal operations stage (around age 12), and hence should not be taught about Christianity until after this time.
Marlin Jeschke	Children are born innocent, and if in a Christian home, should receive infant baptism and nurture; but, if born in a non-Christian home, must be evangelized for conversion.

biblical principles of parenting have not, but some believers may need to be reminded of the basic child rearing principles. Parachin reminds parents that the Scriptural truths are simple and applicable, and summarizes many of those principles into six basic concepts:

1. *Commit to spiritual parenting.* “[Parents] must accept their God-given responsibility” (Parachin 1996, 27). . . . 2. *Spiritual education begins at birth.* “Although parents cannot expect much from newborns and infants, there is much parents can do to begin spiritual education with babies” (Parachin 1996, 27). . . .
3. *Teach children simple ways to pray.* “Parents should remember children can learn to pray before they learn to read” (Parachin 1996, 27). . . . 4. *Remember, you are your child’s primary role model.* “Children are constantly learning enduring values by observing how parents relate to family, friends, neighbors, and even

strangers" (Parachin 1996, 28). . . . 5. *Train children to be role models for others.* "Creating a leadership mentality – strength of mind, moral awareness, independent thinking, spiritual sensitivity, and acting for the common good - will help children not to succumb to peer pressure because they will follow their own beliefs and values" (Parachin 1996, 28). . . . 6. *Point out spiritual principles from daily life.* "Each day watch for ordinary events that can be turned into object lessons by pointing out spiritual principles" (Parachin 1996, 28).

The Local Congregation and Children's Ministry

While the institution of the family is the only designated educational system in the Old Testament, the New Testament recognizes the family as being central to the spiritual nurturing of children, but with the advent of the church, a new partnership is suggested to enhance the growth of children. Children need their parents to lead them through spiritual formation, but they need the church as well (Yust 2004, 164). The church provides children a community in which they can discover more fully who God is, and "they need the benefit of others' discoveries about divine love and others' testimonies to the challenges of faithful living" (Yust 2004, 164). LeBar presents a passionate explanation of the need for ministry to children in the local church (LeBar 1952). While she covers the breadth of teaching children in the church, her eight foundational statements of children's ministry in the church are of particular importance here. These statements are based on biblical proof texts and the experiences of many pastors and children's leaders (LeBar 1952, 20-30).

1. The Bible clearly teaches that Christ Jesus calls the children to Himself (Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17) (LeBar 1952, 20).
2. The most favorable sail (sic) for sowing the seed of the Word is the plastic heart of a child (Matthew 13:1-23) (LeBar 1952, 21).

3. Early childhood's natural faith and dependency are soon outgrown (1 Kings 20:40; Luke 10:21) (LeBar 1952, 23).
4. Habits of the first seven years are indelibly established (Proverbs 22:6) (LeBar 1952 25).
5. Less time and effort are necessary to win many children to Christ than one adult (LeBar 1952, 26).
6. Children have their whole lives ahead of them for service (LeBar 1952, 26).
7. Children open many homes for personal work (LeBar 1952, 27).
8. A teacher's own life is matured as he sees himself as God's child learning his higher ways (LeBar 1952, 29).

Bunge expresses significant concerns about the church and its ministry to children (Bunge 2004). While she is not speaking from an expressly evangelical position, her concerns should be heeded by all denominations. She summarizes her concern when she says, "Although many in the church care for children and have created beneficial programs for them, the church often lacks a strong commitment to children and treats them as "the least of these" (Bunge 2004, 42). These concerns are statistically based as well as drawn from her personal experience, and directly related to this research. She is quite concerned about the lack of theological reflection on children (Bunge 2004, 45).

Other contributors to children's ministry certainly concur with Bunge's assessment of the church and children and the lack of priority placed on ministry to and by them (Capon 1967, v). Barna describes the state of children's ministry in the church as a dichotomy between what the church does for children and what the church does not do for them (Barna 2003, 37-39). Statistically, churches demonstrate support of children's ministry through allotment of programming, capitol and fiscal resources, and both pastoral and volunteer personnel, but Barna's research also revealed that most

church leaders do not have a basic understanding of what happens spiritually in their own church's children's ministry (Barna 2003, 38-39). A greater concern is the lack of priority towards children's ministry by Protestant pastors in general as Barna discovered that "when asked to identify their church's top ministry priorities for the current year, only 24 percent mentioned ministry to children" (Barna 2003, 39). While contributors to this issue may place the emphasis of a child's role in the church too greatly on their autonomy, the benefits of ministering to them must be understood. As David Jensen argues, "the church's attention to children has anthropological implications (clarifying who we are), Christological consequences (clarifying who Christ is), and profound ecclesial dimensions (pointing to a church where all children have a voice)" (Jensen 2005, 132).

As Bunge continues her indictment:

Although churches have highly developed teachings on related issues such as abortion, human sexuality, gender relations and contraception, they do not offer sustained reflection on children or parental and communal obligations toward them. Children also do not play a role in the way systematic theologians think about central theological themes, such as the nature of faith, language about God, and the task of the church. (Bunge 2004, 43)

The solution to this problem according to Bunge is to reconsider six primary themes of teaching in the church that will lead to a reformation of sorts concerning the church's responsibilities towards children (Bunge 2004, 44). These six themes are summarized here. The church should reemphasize the biblical truth that children are "gifts from God and sources of joy" as seen in Genesis 30:22, 1 Samuel 1:11, 19, and Psalm 127:3 (Bunge 2004, 45). A second theme is that children are born with a sin nature and subsequently, need both to be evangelized and directed (Bunge 2004, 46-47). The third theological

theme to reemphasize to the church is that children are “developing beings who need instruction and guidance” (Bunge 2004, 48). Fourth, children are fully human and made in the image of God, and fifth, children are models of faith and sources of revelation (Bunge 2004, 49). The sixth theme is that children are often “orphans, neighbors, and strangers in need of justice and compassion,” (Bunge 2004, 50).

Corporate Worship and the Child’s Place in the Church

There is no definitive answer to the question of whether or not to include children in corporate worship with adults or how to create a separate worship experience for children while in the life of the church, but much of the literature strives to answer this perplexing question and typically with one of the aforementioned options. These two sides of the argument of children in worship seem to be motivated by theological presuppositions and education assumptions. For example, Capon and Capon argue that it is unreasonable to assume that a child could benefit from corporate worship with adults (Capon and Capon 1967, 45-46). Beckwith is concerned that isolating children from multi-generational worship limits the fellowship of the child from the body of Christ and does not provide those children with the opportunity to learn from the corporate worship experience (Beckwith 2004, 98). Similarly, Chapman advocates an actual class where parents and children learn to worship together but in an environment “as much like an adult service as possible while maintaining an awareness of the child’s short attention span, energy level, and the need for physical activity and visual stimulation” (Chapman 1983, 214).

May et al. have identified some of the educational assumptions and philosophical considerations that influence the debate concerning children's worship (May et al. 2005). The assumptions they suggest may be perplexing but must be addressed to determine the most appropriate means of leading children in worship. The assumptions include:

1. Worship is an adult activity that should meet the needs and interests of that population.
2. Reverent worship is beyond children's abilities and will bore them.
3. Worship for children must be fun, active, and entertaining.
4. If the church is growing, space must be made for adults in worship services.

Much of the debate concerning children's worship in the available literature does center around various perspectives of whether or not and how to include children in adult worship. Hendricks does provide eleven principles that avoid cultural specifics while focusing on theological and developmental concerns that can be applied to any local congregational setting (Hendricks 1980, 83-85). These principles may be best summarized into two categories: (1) to lead children in worship, communicate and focus on God's attributes, works, and His loving relationship to man; (2) to lead children to worship in ways that involve them both at their developmental level while also educating on the corporate worship of the church (Hendricks 1980, 83-85).

Theology of Children through General Revelation

While Scripture is certainly sufficient for the evangelical believer as a guide and inspiration for life, God has also revealed Himself through the natural world or through general revelation (Knight 1998, 168-70). The capacity for a child to know or to

believe in God may be one such example of God demonstrating His existence through natural revelation. Pascal and Lewis suggested that there exists a void within man that can only be filled by God even though men try so many means to do so, and research affirms this theological presupposition through interviews with children (Ledbetter and Bruner 1996, 28-29; Bryant 2002, [printerfriendly.php?article_id=128](#)).

Olivera Petrovich undertook an investigation into a cultural comparison of children to determine whether or not they have an innate concept of God (Niles 2004, 26). Petrovich described her initial research by saying:

My approach to this [research] is very strictly empirical. It begins with children's accounts of the physical world – notably their causal explanations and the way they categorize objects and events around them. I'm interested in children's spirituality as it develops in their encounter with the physical world, not through the teaching they may receive in Bible classes and so on. I'm not at all looking at the cultural transmission of spirituality. (Bryant 2002, [printerfriendly.php?article_id=128](#))

To accomplish this, Petrovich interviewed children from Great Britain and Japan, two drastically different cultures, and asked those children to identify the source of creation for various objects (Niles 2004, 26). While expecting Japanese children to give a non-spiritual response, they actually responded just as the British children did, identifying God as the creator of the material objects they were shown. Petrovich recalls her Japanese research assistant's response, “‘We Japanese don’t think about God as creator – it’s just not part of the Japanese philosophy.’ So it was wonderful when these children said, ‘*Kamisama!* God! God made it!’ That was probably the most significant finding” (Bryant 2002, [printerfriendly.php?article_id=128](#)).

Children’s Ministry in a Developmental Framework

The influence of developmentalism on contemporary children’s ministry

cannot be overstated. Piaget, Kohlberg, Erickson, Fowler, and others have influenced how children's ministry should be approached based on the age and stage of development of the individual child. Some authors have expressed concern for an over emphasis on developmentalism because it may leave children to be viewed in terms of their potentiality from stage to stage rather than appreciating their value as individuals no matter what their age (Devries 2001, 163). Yust warns of the impact to children's faith development by the influence of developmentalism as she says:

According to [developmentalism], faith is something that children only acquire as they mature and become capable of asserting to particular ideas about interpretations of the religious life. It suggests that faith development is an outcome of proper human development rather than human development being only one factor in how persons experience and express faith during their lifetimes. (Yust 2004, 3)

While the particulars of their developmental theories are not essential to this discussion, the collective effect of them is. Few models of children's ministry do not reflect some consideration of developmental concepts.

Even James Fowler whose research led to the Faith Development Theory recognizes the impact of developmentalism as a whole on those who influence children's ministry as he describes:

Curriculum developers in the Southern Baptist, United Methodist, and other mainline Protestant churches have made serious efforts to let developmental theories inform the selection and presentation of biblical and theological contents in church school curriculum. They have generated educational strategies which take seriously insights from the work of Jean Piaget, Ronald Goldman, Lawrence Kohlberg, Erik Erikson, and our work on faith development. Teachers and pastors will derive the full benefit from this work of curriculum developers if they let the developmental perspectives give them windows through which to see clearly into the thought and valuing world of the child. (Fowler 1983, 197)

Similarly, Grimes makes an intentional effort to allow children's ministry and developmentalism to coalesce in order to provide what he describes as "developmental

insights” (Grimes 1983). He identifies six insights that could be helpful to the children’s leader:

1. Trust. “Authority figures . . . are the means through which children first begin to sense the importance of the Bible and to acquire its message” (Grimes 1983, 225).
2. Self-Worth. “A sense of self-worth comes from trustworthy adults who affirm the child as a person, commend him or her for work or play, and build the basis for a recognition of dependence on God and a healthy sense of sin and forgiveness” (Grimes 1983, 225).
3. Sense of Belonging. “The human family, through both creation and redemption, is not a collection of isolated individuals but a community” (Grimes 1983, 225).
4. Sense of Relationship. “Children must be loved, but they also need to love others, to be effectively related to them” (Grimes 1983, 226).
5. Sense of Right and Wrong. “Since not every instance of contemporary life is covered by a biblical injunction, the task of the teacher is often to translate a truth of the Bible into the experience of the child in the process of building a sense of right and wrong and teaching the biblical basis for making choices” (Grimes 1983, 226).
6. Sense of Meaning. “The Bible must be interpreted in the episodic (early childhood) or narrative (later childhood) means through which children acquire meaning” (Grimes 1983, 226).

Developmentalism and Bible Content

Additionally, the acceptance and influence of developmental theory within children’s ministry has created much discussion of how and at what age should biblical content be taught. The degree to which children’s ministry contributors operate with educational assumptions will likely influence what methods they promote for application in the local church context. Ballard and Fleck illustrate this through their application of Piagetian stages as a guide for the introduction of Bible content to children (Ballard and Fleck 1975, 164-71). They argue that based on multiple research findings, stages of

intellectual development theory are equally relevant to the introduction of biblical concepts (Ballard and Fleck 1975, 165).

Though many children's leaders advocate this developmental structure within their ministry, many of these same leaders debate whether the curriculum of a ministry to children in the local church should be child-centered or Bible-centered (Ballard and Fleck 1975, 165, 167). Pyne and MacIlvaine advocate explicit Bible teaching, including teaching the principles of authorship, authority, anticipation, and activity (Pyne and MacIlvaine 1994, 8-10). The distinction between these two concepts, albeit subtle, concerns introducing Bible content at later stages as children are cognitively ready versus "teaching young children with limited cognitive abilities the [Bible-centered] curriculum . . . but at the same time remaining cognizant of the child's total developmental needs and limitations at any stage in life" (Ballard and Fleck 1975, 165, 167).

Goldman's Perspective

Goldman's research concerning religious education and his subsequent concerns with the appropriate age levels for religious content in curricula are based on his merger of Piagetian, Ericksonian, and Kohlbergian thought (Goldman 1964). His theoretical structure of a child's concept of God is helpful to see the categories of thought including verbal, intellectual, emotional, moral and aesthetic (Goldman 1964, 17). Recognizing these assumptions, Goldman interviewed many children at varying ages to determine the depth of their understanding of several religious concepts such as the Bible, God, Jesus Christ, the Church, and the involvement of God in the world (Goldman 1964).

Many concerns with religious education were revealed through the interviews of the sample group, but Goldman best summarizes the implications of those concerns in his own words:

From an examination of our conclusions of related concepts earlier in this chapter, it is apparent that material chosen for any age group should be examined to see what concepts are central for the story, biblical passage or other material, if it is to be understood at a satisfactory level. By ‘satisfactory level’, we mean where some measure of religious insight is attainable. This depends upon other aspects of the pupil’s development, and the level attainable will vary with differing material, as is evident from the differing conceptual levels attained by the same child in the data from our three stories. (Goldman 1964, 224-25)

Critics of Goldman’s proposed limited use of the Bible in children’s curriculum offer interesting insight into this debate. Csanyi suggests that Goldman and those that have developed curriculum based on his contributions have applied Piaget’s cognitive stages to spiritual development to the exclusion of faith development (Csanyi 1982, 524). His concern is that Goldman’s child-centered approach to teaching the Bible only for pre-adolescents attempts to avoid transitions of faith development which are both painful and necessary to spiritual maturity (Csanyi 1982, 524).

Reconsiderations for Developmentalism

A less reactionary understanding of developmentalism is advocated by Ratcliff, and his observations of the research suggests a blend of developmentalism and Bible-centered curriculum. Ratcliff’s observations begin by noting two misconceptions by children of Bible content because of their cognitive development (Ratcliff 1987, 21). “First, the child may attempt to comprehend material which is beyond his or her cognitive capacity,” and “second, once a misconception is acquired, the child tends to assimilate

new information by changing his or her perceptions to fit the existing misconception” (Ratcliff 1987, 21).

With a review of the limited research concerning pedo-cognitive development Ratcliff suggests that some of the conclusions drawn concerning Bible concept teaching is overstated (Ratcliff 1987, 31). The response should be more thoughtful, introducing Bible content but at appropriate stages of development where children are able to distinguish concrete versus figurative language (Ratcliff 1987, 21, 22, 31). Yust is in agreement with Ratcliff’s recommendation of a balance between faith and developmentalism (Yust 2004, 124). She describes the need to be sensitive to children’s spiritual growth by saying, “we need to tailor our expectations of children’s spiritual reflection to their age and stage of psycho social development” (Yust 2004, 124).

More recent brain research has instigated additional discussion and debate concerning the spiritual nurturing of children and the relationship to developmentalism. May and Ratcliff have offered a number of conclusions concerning childhood spirituality based on a summary of recent research findings which can help children’s ministry leadership improve their effectiveness because “there have been recent investigations that suggest that certain patterns in neural activity tend to correspond with the experiences of a spiritual nature” (May and Ratcliff 2004, 151). Much of their review of the available research led them to a conclusion that too often cognitive development issues have superceded the spirituality of children when according to research, the brain may develop the propensity for spiritual awareness before the cognitive ability to express their faith (May and Ratcliff 2004). As they summarize their conclusions:

Given the evidence presented . . . about the limbic system, it seems crucial to take seriously the possibility that children's experiences or encounters with God can be facilitated by preparing environments that allow connatural knowing and relational consciousness to emerge The child's spirituality should influence the form ministry takes rather than merely following a cultural trend or cognitive theory." (May and Ratcliff 2004, 162)

Just as new brain research has influenced the discussion of childhood spirituality in recent years, so has it also brought new thought to the child and adolescent brain's cognitive development. The available research is relatively congruent concerning the brain's development process during adolescent years although the true implications of these findings still need further study (NIMH 2001, Publicat/teenbrain.cfm). The summary findings describe the human brain as going through a reproduction of gray matter beginning in adolescent years with the process not completing until the age of 25 (Willis 2006).

There are several important implications for working with older children and adolescents in relation to these findings. The most important implication is that the traditional understanding of the human brain as fully mature past childhood should no longer be considered as accurate because the brain is seen by imaging technology in a state of flux as late as 25 years of age (Walsh 2004, 43-44; Willis 2006, NIMH 2001, Publicat/teenbrain.cfm). The lack of brain maturation has been linked to a number of problems among teenagers including behavioral problems and impaired judgment when driving (Walsh 2004; Williamson 2005, ac2/wp-dyn/A52687-2005Jan31). This also brings into question the traditional education assumptions of learning, memorization, and understanding among young people. Willis describes a number of educational implications for teaching children and teenagers that are experiencing this period of brain

restructuring while also communicating how research demonstrates the importance of new educational considerations:

Brain research provides insights into how the brain unconsciously pays attention and tunes in to process information of the moment. When the senses register information, the coded message travels through regions of the brain that can either expedite or block its progress. The thalamus processes the sensory input and determines whether it will be kept in temporary awareness or moved to memory storage. If the input is processed as more than transient awareness, it is passed along to the neurons in the amygdala, where it can be to positive emotional cueing and move along to the memory storage. If negative emotions have overloaded the amygdala, the affective filter will block passage of the data into memory Conversely, when these gatekeepers of the limbic system are jump-started by positive emotion, more brain activity is seen passing through these portals and lighting up the frontal lobe memory storage centers. (Willis 2006, 40)

Insightful Research on Educational Assumptions

Concerning the sociological issues impacting children's ministry today, Don Ratcliff makes some important observations about the social behavior of children, and subsequently asks some pertinent questions about the application of those observations (Ratcliff 2000). Ratcliff studied multiple hours of video footage of elementary age children in the hallways of their school and other parts of the building and then interviewed over fifty of those children.

His observations and interviews revealed three categories of socialization means which include school lines, rows, and clusters (Ratcliff 2000). These three methods of socialized gathering revealed much about the distinction between school culture and peer culture. As he interviewed some of the children in the school, Ratcliff recognized that the meaning of the school rules and organization did not coincide with the understanding of the students (Ratcliff 2000, 60). He theorized that some of the difficulty

in educational ministry in the church is a possible result of using school culture as a template for education ministry (Ratcliff 2000, 66).

Westerhoff also recognized the possible connection between the structure of school being applied to religious education in the church and the seeming lack of success with discipleship in the church (Westerhoff 1976, 6). He dubbed this methodology as a *schooling-instructional paradigm* (Westerhoff 1976, 6). He describes the results of this paradigm on the church:

And I have found that there are quite a few churches where the dream of ‘the perfect’ church school has been actualized. In these churches, most of the teachers are well trained and many have developed their own exemplary curriculum resources. The educational plants, equipment, supplies, and organization would make many a public school envious. And yet, in almost every case they have evaluated their achievements and found them lacking. The modern church school at its very best is less than adequate for our day. The reason is another anomaly in the school-instructional paradigm. (Westerhoff 1976, 7).

The questions that Ratcliff poses based on his observations and the distinction between school culture and peer culture in his study are of particular relevance to this researcher. Some of his questions are:

1. Is the conflict between school culture and peer culture a significant problem in educational ministry?
2. How can educational ministry minimize the conflict so that our valuable time is not consumed with suppressing expressions of peer culture?
3. Can some aspects of peer culture be used to encourage a lived faith? Is a fusion of peer and school culture possible that will be effective in educational ministry? (Ratcliff 2000, 66-67).

These questions and others like them are not answered directly by Ratcliff because he leaves his readers to contemplate their answers, but these questions are essential to understanding children’s ministry within the changing postmodern culture.

Prior Conclusions Suggested by Ratcliff

In an essay written prior to his investigation into the construct meanings of elementary school students, Ratcliff made some important conclusions about children within the culture of the church and its impact on the spiritual development of children (Ratcliff 1992, 134-38). He briefly considers the goal of religious education and the effectiveness of the church in resocializing children (Ratcliff 1992, 134). Resocialization is the sociological concept of transitioning to the desired behaviors and values of one group to another. Ratcliff suggests that there is an unintentional hindrance in the church that prevents it from resocializing, or nurturing, children.

This “hidden curriculum” as it has been labeled includes errors with the church’s misguided attempts to teach children. It is argued that the church has often been more concerned with encouraging children to conform to the existing culture rather than the radical norms of Christianity (Ratcliff 1992, 134). Additionally, Ratcliff expresses concern with “the ‘Language of Zion,’ a curious dialect in many churches that is a mixture of King James English and theological terms. This dialogue is most noted in public prayers, hymns, and sermons but occasionally in other contexts as well” (Ratcliff 1992, 135). Ratcliff best describes the consequences of this hidden curriculum when he says, “While this exclusionary factor is negative enough, dialects can take the place of genuine belief – one who says the right words may be considered more spiritual than one who has not yet learned the dialect” (Ratcliff 1992, 136).

School Environment in the Church

Considering the aforementioned concerns expressed by Ratcliff with school

culture being imposed in a church setting as a framework for communicating, some attention should be given to prevailing educational philosophies within the American classroom. There are basically four accepted philosophic approaches to learning in schools which include perennialism, essentialism, progressivism, and existentialism (Ryan and Cooper 1992, 80-89). These broad categories summarize the historical breadth of educational philosophy with every school choosing some form of one of them or a blended application of these philosophies (Kienel, Gibbs, and Berry 1995). Each of these approaches to education requires a brief explanation.

Perennialism is characterized by an “awareness of, and gratitude for, the heritage of Western civilization” (Wilson 1991, 83). This classical method of education with an emphasis on the great books of the past was revitalized by Mortimer Adler and has a growing contingency of advocates within the realm of private Christian schools (Ryan and Cooper 1992, 81; Wilson 1991). Essentialism is the concept of passing along the basics of a society or culture in order for students to function and thrive within that culture (Layman 1995, 92). E. D. Hirsch has suggested the need for a core curriculum as a means of improving education in America and has seen improvement in schools that adopted essentialist based curriculum (Hirsch 1996, 222-38).

Progressivism and Existentialism are more modern approaches to schooling that were developed within the last century. John Dewey, the father of progressive education, urged for a naturalistic approach to teaching and learning, emphasizing the individual needs and desires of the student as a basis for teaching academics (Layman 1995, 76-77). To be more specific, “progressivism . . . aims at developing problem-solving ability” (Ryan and Cooper 1992, 83). In reaction to the war and depressions of

the first half of the twentieth century, existentialism developed as a search for individual meaning and significance (Knight 1998, 72). While there is some interest by existentialists in a basic educational curriculum, the highest priority for this approach is with the individual students's personal interests and choices (Knight 1998, 78).

Understanding Cultural Relevancy

As quoted and more thoroughly defined in chapter 1, "If something makes sense it is culturally relevant" (Sullivan 2003). Sullivan's experience with cultural relevancy is apropos as she describes its importance, "A lack of cultural relevancy can result in a person or group feeling like they are out of their element and do not know the rules or expectations. In other words, they are an 'air breather' being asked to function in a fish tank" (Sullivan 2003). No matter what the context of a teaching moment, it is essential that the information communicated is done so in a way that is understandable and meaningful to the intended audience.

Within the context of children's ministry specifically, Miller admonishes those attempting children's ministry to consider both the language of cultural relevancy as well as the content of cultural relevancy (Miller and Staal 2004, 72-74). Language is an important first concern in order to be culturally relevant, because the intent of teaching is lost if children do not understand what is being said (Miller and Staal 2004, 73). Content is equally important in the effort to be culturally relevant, and Miller uses three questions to evaluate the cultural relevancy of the content of the curriculum utilized in her church:

Question One: Know what? "[Bible] truth must be crystal clear so kids will remember it throughout their week *Question Two: So what?* "A bridge must be built to show that biblical truth applies to specific circumstances kids face; it cannot be left up to them to construct the connection *Question Three: Now what?* "Do

not leave the application up to their imagination . . . The goal for each lesson should be to do everything possible to make sure that children ‘do not merely listen to the word’ but ‘do what it says’ (James 1:22).” (Miller and Staal 2004, 74)

Improved strategies for reaching children within their cultural context may be gleaned from others that have also given considerable thought to evangelizing within various social constructs. Richardson delved into the issue of ministry in differing cultures from the perspective of the international missionary (Richardson 1981). Throughout his work he recounts numerous missional efforts to reach indigenous people groups by looking for pre-existent spiritual themes with which those people would already be familiar (Richardson 1981). Similarly, Hutchcraft identifies twelve cultural themes among youth in American culture that must be addressed in order for ministry to be effective (Hutchcraft 1996, 19-35). Those themes include issues such as their spiritual condition, entertainment choices, and social idiosyncrasies (Hutchcraft 1996, 19-35). Hutchcraft’s intention is to demonstrate how understanding these characteristics will further youth evangelism, but the concept of considering the culture in which one ministers is applicable for children’s ministry as well. Hutchcraft’s own words relay his concern when he says:

It is obvious that the young people around us are in urgent need of a cure for their desperation, pain, and lostness. But before we begin to treat them, we must understand where they hurt and the underlying causes of their “symptoms.” Before we can begin to develop an efficient strategy for changing their lives, it is important that we understand the young people we want to reach. (Hutchcraft 1998, 19)

Dalton describes this struggle, the historic effort for the church to communicate the gospel in relevant terms, when he says, “Throughout the centuries Christians have used the prevailing communication media of their culture to communicate the gospel. Their goal has been . . . to proclaim it in ways that would best allow people to hear it and

respond to it" (Dalton 2001, 6). While some suggest that the modern cultural context of children can be defined simply as "media," consideration must still be given to how this cultural trend in communication developed (Baumgart, Ellis, and Carper 2006, 38).

Barna's research with children and the church over the years has led him to develop a layered system of influence in the lives of boys and girls. He identified three "tiers of influence" in American culture today (Barna 2003, 57-58). The highest tier of influence includes "contemporary music, movies (including videos and DVDs), television programming, the Internet, publications (dominated by books but including magazines and newspapers), laws and public policies, and parents" (Barna 2003, 58). Unfortunately, the lowest tier of influence is where the church, para-church, and extended families are found, and while these levels might vary from person to person, Barna's concern is that these influences are true for most children ages 5 to 18 years (Barna 2003, 58). The concern of the church over such findings is noted by proponents of more contemporary children's ministry models who express the need for the church to take advantage of the first tier of influences, utilizing media as a significant means of outreach (Baumgart, Ellis, and Carper 2006, 40).

Communication Methods in Children's Ministry

Communicating with children in terms that are understandable for them is essential for effectiveness in ministry. Theological and doctrinal concerns cannot be transmitted to children as they would in any other context, but children can grasp spiritual concepts if those concepts are explained in familiar language and cultural contexts (Hendricks 1978, 65). There are communication challenges with children because their

language skills are not as developed as adults, and Berryman notes three problems that can arise when teaching spirituality because of the lack of language development (Berryman 2005, uploads/pages/downloads/Children_Mature_Spirituality.pdf). “First, words are suspect when they are severed from experience. Second, when verbal and nonverbal communication are at odds, something goes wrong with relationships. Third, religious education is sometimes framed so that the unintentional teaching of its misuse results” (Berryman 2005, uploads/pages/downloads/Children_Mature_Spirituality.pdf). Adult-child communication has to be done appropriately although many adults underestimate a child’s ability to understand them, leaving adults to avoid communication with children in many situations (Elgin 1996, 11). Much of Elgin’s findings concerning language and children revealed that children need adults to speak to them and not beneath them, and adults need to let children have ample opportunity to respond to adults when in a conversation (Elgin 1996, 11, 23).

Media is highly influential in the lives of children as they have become accustomed to sending and receiving information through technology (Elgin 1996, 33). The consequence of this trend is a subculture of children that demands the speed of communication with other people that can only be offered by the computer (Elgin 1996, 33). The insight from Baumgart, Ellis, and Carper concerning the current media driven generation also is helpful in the struggle to understand the role of media on culturally relevant communication and children’s ministry. Children are saturated with media as the situation is described:

To Generation M, media is far more than TV. For every one hour of television watched, kids today spend four hours using other media. Online gaming, music, instant messaging, blogs, Xbox, Playstation, portable handheld games and

computer-based interactive games make up the collective television for this generation. The significant distinction of today's media is that at its core, it is participatory, engaging kids in customized journeys based on their interests and skills. (Baumgart, Ellis, and Carper 2006, 38)

Communication issues are not the only challenges to maintaining cultural relevancy in children's ministry. It is equally important to be aware of changes in culture from one generation to the next if relevancy is to be sustained (Jones 2005, 62).

Children's leaders need to find ways to adjust to cultural trends such as the ones cited by Jones. She notes several cultural trends that will impact children's ministry for the next generation, which are those born after 2003. Some of the trends she describes include racial diversity, changing educational methodologies, technologically savvy children, exceeding pluralism, and changing families (Jones 2005, 62-66).

The social context of children must be understood as well if a church is to be relevant in its ministry with them. May et al. identify several significant influences on children of which children's ministry leaders must be sensitive (May et al. 2005, 116-25). These levels of influence are similar to other findings by Barna concerning cultural influences, but his concerns will be addressed at a later point (Barna 2003). The societal influences in the lives of children as recounted by May et al. may be described as *primary environments* and *secondary environments* (May et al. 2005, 117-18). Primary environments include institutions such as the family, school, and church, while secondary environments include factors such as parental careers and extended family (May et al. 2005, 117-18). Addressing these influences includes answering some basic considerations about the ministry of the church. The church must understand who makes up the community because "paying attention to the particular needs, experiences, and

gifts of people who are here gives perspective to our decisions about how we minister” (May et al. 2005, 119). Other essentials to social context are to learn about the community itself as well as the significant media influences in a child’s life (May et al. 2005, 122-23).

Yust presents a differing approach to understanding culture relevancy and the religious lives of children. She does not suggest that the church has the responsibility to communicate with children in a culturally relevant language, but that children need to learn the language and culture of their religious faith (Yust 2004, 21-40). The world of religious faith is a second culture that children must learn to navigate and adapt in their lives (Yust 2004, 29). She describes this process as “a new world in which both children and the adults who sojourn with them may be immigrants. Learning to identify with this second culture requires intentional encounters with its many and varied aspects: its language, values, beliefs, practices, images, resources, and institutions” (Yust 2004, 29).

Critiquing Culturally Relevant Ministry Models

In recent years, contributors to children’s ministry have attempted to define this age specific ministry in terms of models. A few of these possible models may be considered to be designed with the intent to be culturally relevant, and in some ways less determined by historic methods such as catechism or developmentalism. May, Posterski, Stonehouse, and Cannel in their thorough examination of a broad spectrum of children’s ministry define five primary models of children’s ministry. These models include the *School Model*, the *Gold Star/Win a Prize Model*, the *Carnival Model*, the *Pilgrim’s Journey Model*, and the *Dance with God Model* (May et al. 2005). A brief explanation of

each of these should be helpful to understand the spectrum of ministry models presented. The *School Model* has been “the most widely used metaphor for ministry with children” over the last two centuries, emphasizing learning the Bible although this may happen “without a context” (May et al. 2005, 10-11). The *Gold Star/Win a Prize Model* emphasizes a reward system to motivate children to learn or respond with some other desired result such as attendance. The *Carnival Model* is characterized by an emphasis on fun environments with a variety of activities for children and places for them to gather. The *Pilgrims’ Journey Model* “is an educational model based on a curriculum of life and spiritual growth as set forth in Deuteronomy 6 and other passages, such as Philippians 1:6.” (May et al. 2005, 17). The *Dance with God Model* is described as more relational than the others described here in that the child’s relationships with others and especially God grow in “cognitive, affective, behavioral, and especially the spiritual dimensions.” (May et al. 2005, 19).

Of these five children’s ministry philosophical and methodological approaches, the *Carnival Model* seems most concerned with cultural relevancy as the means to reach children. They define and describe the *Carnival Model* as:

Presently, one of the rapidly spreading metaphors or models in children’s ministry in the United States could be called the Carnival model. Since the early 1990’s there has been a growing belief among some groups that church should be the high point of the week for children. To many children’s leaders, that means it must be fun. This view is more prevalent in large churches that have significant resources of people, space, and finances.

A visitor to one of these ministries may be struck at the outset by an atmosphere reminiscent of Chuck E. Cheese’s, a restaurant chain that caters to children. Large, open spaces are full of games, activities, and crafts. Lots of color, energy, and happy noise fill the room. Children, lots of children, mill around engaged in their activities of choice. “Carnival” churches often have similar age-appropriate activities for preschoolers. (May et al. 2005, 15)

This model has both strengths and weaknesses according to its definers. It is valuable for the large number of children it attracts to its carnival-like events, and children seem to both enjoy these environments and invite many of their friends to attend as well. While the teaching is intended to be entertaining and engaging, it utilizes object lessons and analogies as primary methodologies (May et al. 2005, 16). Contrarily, this model is criticized for being too driven by entertainment reflective of the culture and not by spirituality (May et al. 2005, 16). In other words, “It [may be] difficult for children to experience awe and wonder before the majesty and holiness of God” (May et al. 2005, 16). To be fair, this description does not reflect necessarily the opinions of those that have implemented this model or versions of it, and a specific example of a *Carnival Model* will be presented here.

An Example of the Carnival Model

Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois and North Point Community Church in Alpharetta, Georgia are examples of the *Carnival Model* in children’s ministry. Stanley, Joiner, and Lane of North Point Community Church describe their *Carnival* ministry with a different tone than that of May et al.:

KidStuf, the first children’s program we created at North Point, was designed so parents could participate in an environment with their kids. Instead of putting kids in an environment that was designed for adults so they would get excited about what we taught parents, we turned the idea on its head. We put parents in an environment designed for the whole family so they would get excited about what we taught their kids. The program is a fast-moving, multimedia, Nickelodeon-style presentation. (Stanley, Joiner, and Lane 2004, 111)

The intent of this model of ministry from this church’s perspective is not to be entertaining but to use familiar cultural contexts such as *Nickelodeon*, a cable television

network for children, to capture the attention of both children and their parents as the Bible message is presented.

Further understanding of the intent of a church like North Point can be gained from their description of their teaching philosophy. The curriculum developed by North Point was based on Luke 2:52, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Stanley, Joiner, and Lane 2004, 127). They developed three principles for teaching children in order for them to develop as Jesus did based on this verse and include:

1. The ability to make wise decisions based on the truth of Scripture.
2. A willingness to put their faith in God through every situation of life.
3. Their demonstration of love and kindness to the people in their world.

To pursue these spiritual, developmental concepts, North Point implemented the *Carnival Model* for ministry, or as they describe it:

We created a curriculum called 252 Basics that organizes Bible stories, scriptural principles, drama, and creative lesson plans around these three concepts. From the moment a child walks through the door, every activity reinforces one principle over and over. Our Bible story time always positions Scripture as a source of *wisdom*. The worship always emphasizes the power and love of God as one we can *trust*. Small groups allow an opportunity for kids to be with *friends*, to dialogue about their faith and encourage each other. (Stanley, Joiner, and Lane 2004, 128)

Anthony's Quadrant Approach to Children's Ministry

Defining various models of children's ministry may be a manageable approach to discussing the variety of methods and philosophies currently present in this field of study. Michael Anthony's contribution to this discussion follows a similar pattern as that of May et al. when determining ministry models but does so with a different starting point

(Anthony 2006). Where May et al described more specific models of ministry, Anthony actually describes models of ministries in terms of quadrants based on the relationship between experiencing God and knowing God (Anthony 2006, 34). These quadrants include *Contemplative Reflective*, *Instructional Analytic*, *Pragmatic Participatory*, and *Media Driven-Active Engagement* (Anthony 2007). Each quadrant suggested in Anthony's book is described by a children's ministry contributor who either promotes or identifies with the given approach.

Each of these quadrants provide an important perspective into children's ministry. The *Contemplative-Reflective Quadrant* "is characterized by periods of quiet reflection, introspective prayer, and storytelling. Its goal is two-fold: first to empty the mind of self-absorbed thoughts and to come before God as a clean vessel" (Anthony 2006, 36). The *Instructional-Analytic Quadrant*:

is defined as God working through the instruction of his word and human agency whereby he creates an environment where the young person comes to know Jesus at an appropriate age and then grows in that relationship. This environment features four dimensions: Scripture memory, biblical instruction, a graduated award system, and a systematic structure for training. (Anthony 2006, 104)

The Pragmatic-Participatory Quadrant "is dependent on a child's thought process that is formed through active participatory learning. This model is known for engaging the children in learning while using a variety of different methods to teach them with practical and relevant application" (Anthony 2006, 165). *The Media Driven-Active Engagement Quadrant*:

uses technology and interactive media to emphasize discovery-based and cooperative learning. . . . Rather than relying solely on lecture, which appeals to only the analytic learner, the Media-Driven Active-Engagement Model employs a variety of methods in its instructional design to facilitate and maximize learning for all learners." (Anthony 2006, 225)

Selecting an Appropriate Ministry Model

When describing other inventive models of children's discipleship and worship, Cannell and May make an important claim concerning children's ministry, "No one model is the right one for every children's ministry" (Cannell and May 2000, 54). The heart of the effort to reach children and disciple them should be "to do whatever it takes to teach our children about our God attractively" (Cannell and May 2000, 54). Equally important is the determination of a ministry model that allows for the fulfillment of the ministry philosophy of the church, and it is the children's leader's responsibility to do so as May and others explain, "The children's ministry leader has the challenging but important responsibility to ensure that there is harmony between the metaphor for the ministry, the educational approach and methodology, and the ultimate purpose of ministry – that there is congruity between purpose and methods" (May et al. 2005, 24).

The advancement to children's ministry from this discussion may be seen best in two summary statements, one provided by Michael Anthony and the other by Michelle Anthony. Michael Anthony describes the purpose and subsequent benefit of his quadrant proposal when he says:

Programs that are designed to help facilitate this spiritual maturing process which are created with children in mind must take into consideration the maturation process. Accommodating the various stages of cognitive, psycho social, and emotional development are essential for successful assimilation of new material. The scriptures must be taught in a way that do not violate how God created us to learn since how one person perceives and processes spiritual insights may be different from another. The teacher-learner process is a valid basis for achieving spiritual development. It's the intention of this book to provide the reader with multiple models for achieving children's spiritual formation so that from this broad spectrum the ministry leader will be better equipped to make wise choices regarding the use of curriculum, volunteer leadership, facilities, and training requirements necessary for effective children's ministry. (Anthony 2007, 18)

Michelle Anthony also expressed a qualified, pragmatic approach to children's ministry when she wrote:

The best model for children's ministry is the one that meets the need of your church, your community, and the children entrusted to your body of believers. Obviously no single model can be applied to every church due to the many differences that exist in culture, geography, denomination, and so on. However, the model you choose to implement must be biblically based, educationally appropriate, and easily adaptable to the particular needs of your church. (Anthony 2001, 216)

Postmodernity as the Church's Challenge

Postmodernity is the shift in culture from the modern period characterized by greater stability, the recognition of absolute truth, and rationalism to a culture that does not recognize absolute truth, views spirituality as pluralistic, and has a more experiential approach to life (Kimball 2003, 58-61). As Kimball describes postmodernism, he also identifies the challenge for the church to minister in this culture:

In a post-Christian world, pluralism is the norm. Buddhism, Wicca, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, or an eclectic blend - it's all part of the soil. The way people respond and think is more fluid than systematic, more global than local, more communal than individualistic. And in postmodern soil, a high value is placed on personal preference and choice, as opposed to predetermined truth. (Kimball 2003, 60)

The trends in media discussed earlier are closely connected to the postmodern shift. Technology and media are integrated into the lives of postmoderns too tightly to be overlooked by the church (Johnston 2001, 47-48). For the church to respond to postmoderns and their need for technology has already proven to be a challenge. Sweet notes the hesitancy of the church to deal with technology and the future:

Either the church is blind to the changes that are dragging us into the unknown, or our blinkered vision is causing nail-biting and hand wringing, washing us from any responsibility in bringing about the new horizonless world. Our narrow eyelids and sober survey of what is going on out there makes us concerned about how to help

people through the night than how to help people make it through tomorrow. (Sweet 2001, 25-26)

The cultural challenges presented by postmodernity have created world view perspectives that often conflict with the fulfillment of evangelism and discipleship among children. Recognizing the importance of the family as a part of faith development, Brown observes that “choosing a life of faith in our postmodern world is no easy task for parents, who often make their children’s faith nurture merely one more choice, rather than a primary focus” (Brown 2001, 64). Brown demonstrates this challenge through specific, cited examples, but the underlying concern is that the postmodern thought process equates every child’s activity as worthwhile and which event a family plans to attend depends on pragmatism not principle (Brown 2001, 64).

The Church’s Response to Cultural Shifts

The church has the challenge of ministering to a postmodern culture, and it is certainly a challenge as the speed of change accelerates so rapidly, but the church is empowered by the Holy Spirit and should not fear ministering and evangelizing with the proper response. The church must be aware of the dichotomy it faces, or as McLaren suggests:

You see, if we have a new world, we will need a new church. We won’t need a new religion per se, but a new framework for our theology. Not a new Spirit, but a new spirituality. Not a new Christ, but a new Christian. Not a new denomination, but a new kind of church in every denomination. Yet we should not underestimate either side of the equation – what must change as well as what must not. (McLaren 2000, 14)

This paradigm change does not come easily as Sweet has alluded, and it is presumable that not all church leaders will accept McLaren’s call for the continued waning of

denominational distinctives (McLaren 2000, 53-63).

Preaching to the quirks of the postmodern culture requires careful planning and sermon preparation that addresses those quirks of the culture (Altrock 2004). One such attempt can be seen in children's media products such as *Veggie Tales*, a popular Bible character based cartoon series, which "draw on one of the continuing strengths of evangelicalism: the exchanging and remembering of testimonies . . . but also puts them on the cutting edge of postmodern Christian ethics . . ." (Work 2001, 474). Other suggested responses for the church will require a paradigm shift in ministry as "Churches in postmodern communities will be built, not around great preachers, but around great experiences" (Sweet 1999, 199). Also the messages presented by pastors must be focused on communicating images more than communicating words due to the visual nature of postmoderns (Sweet 1999, 200).

Conclusion

The review of precedent literature has revealed a variety of issues concerning the theological presuppositions and educational assumptions of those desiring to evangelize and nurture children in the Christian faith. Ministering to children must begin with a biblical understanding of the role God gave children in their families and in their faith communities as seen in the Old Testament. While the New Testament is fairly limited on the subject of children, Jesus clearly elevated their status, and the early church transitioned into the community of faith for believers where it was previously seen in the nation of Israel.

The development of church history reveals a consistent but understated call for

the church and parents to raise children according to the Bible so they may become productive Christians. There seems to be a heightened emphasis in the church on spiritually nurturing children with the advent of the Renaissance and Reformation, and the introduction of psychological theory and developmentalism has led to a wide variety of approaches to children's ministry and the understanding of childhood spirituality.

The contemporary church has a number of issues with which it must wrestle as it strives to reach children with the gospel of Christ. These issues include complexities such as Christian parenting, childhood conversion, developmentalism, cultural shifts, and choosing an appropriate model for implementing children's ministry in the local church context. The church can partner with children's ministry contributors to gain further insight into these issues, but the theological presuppositions and educational assumptions of those leaders must be evaluated before churches seek their unquestioned assistance for training and encouragement.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

Research Design

The research methodology was determined based on the intent to discover answers to research questions concerning children's ministry. Upon an examination of the information collected through extensive interviews with leaders in children's ministry as well as a content analysis of their significant contributions, answers to the following research questions were sought:

Research Question Synopsis

1. What are the dominant attitudes towards the role of cultural relevancy in children's ministry of recognized contributors to children's ministry?
2. What are the dominant theological presuppositions concerning children and children's ministry of those that have made significant contributions to this field?
3. What are the common themes among the theology and attitudes expressed by the contributing leaders towards cultural relevancy as a determining factor in children's ministry methodology?
4. Which, if any, traditional ministry methods for children are considered by the contributors to be ineffective due to their lack of cultural relevance for a postmodern culture?
5. Which, if any, postmodern ministry methods for children are considered by the contributors to be ineffective due to their lack of biblical correctness or developmental appropriateness?

Design Overview

The research design for this descriptive, phenomenological study consisted of extensive interviews with those individuals that have made recognized contributions to children's ministry. Two stages of interviews were conducted by the researcher, the first round of interviews by telephone and the second round by in person contact with additional subjects. The first interviews were conducted by telephone due to constraints of time, scheduling, and other factors. These interviews were recorded, and then they were transcribed. The interviews were subjected to summary analysis and content analysis. The summary analysis was done to determine broad themes of commonalities while the content analysis was done to determine consistencies and inconsistencies of children's ministry jargon, methodology, and motivation. Categories were created based on the summary analysis as well as further terminology, theories, and categories identified from the content analysis.

At the conclusion of the first interviews and their subsequent analysis, it was determined that more data was needed in order to strengthen the validity of the findings. A second round of interviews with additional experts was then conducted with additional recognized contributors to children's ministry, and these interviews were conducted in person by the researcher. The same content analysis was performed with the data collected from the in person interviews as occurred with the telephone interviews. The findings from these groups were then compared and contrasted to determine to what extent the method of interview may have influenced the responses of the contributors or the coding frequency.

Population

The population for this research concern were those individuals that had made recognized contributions to children's ministry for evangelical churches and denominations within the United States. Their contributions to children's ministry must have been made within the last ten years, 1996-2006, in order to have the potential to reflect changes to a postmodern culture. For the purpose of this research, a recognized contribution by a children's ministry leader included conferences, books, journals, articles, curriculum resources, and other media productions that potentially influence how children's ministry is accomplished among evangelical believers. This made the population criterion based because of the level of expertise and influence sought for this study.

Sample and Delimitations

This research concern was intended to discover the theological presuppositions and educational assumptions of children's ministry leaders that have made recognized contributions to children's ministry. The population described was limited, but additional delimitations were necessary in order to discover reasonable answers to the research questions that were proposed. These delimitations include:

1. This study was delimited with the minimum number of participants to be interviewed of 10, and the maximum number will be 25 (Leedy and Ormond 2001, 153).
2. This study was delimited to those that have made a recognized contribution to children's ministry through various means such as sponsoring a conference, writing a book or article, or producing media resources that are intended for children's ministry either for childhood discipleship and evangelism or leadership and ministry development.

3. The contributors work must have been accomplished after 1996 or is actively continued.
4. This study was delimited to evangelicals but not to specific denominations.
5. This study was delimited to those contributors within the United States only.

Limitations and Generalization

The nature of this qualitative study and the criterion based sample limited the generalizations which may have been otherwise determined by the researcher. A significant limitation to the study unavailable response from the broader base of children's ministry leadership from local churches who might otherwise have provided valuable insight into the discussion of theological presuppositions and educational assumptions concerning children's ministry. Respectively, the findings from the sample and their interviews are not necessarily applicable to all contributors to children's ministry or to local congregational leadership.

Another concern for the generalizations of this study was the bias of the children's ministry contributors to be interviewed. The interviews were intended to reveal the presuppositions and assumptions of children's ministry contributors, but their positions may have created a bias that prevented them from viewing the spectrum of ministry philosophy and ministry practice with any objectivity.

Instrumentation

Because of the limited population and the need to gather information specific to the research questions listed previously, instrumentation was in the form of extensive interview questions. The questions were developed in order to determine the theological

presuppositions and educational assumptions of children's ministry contributors. Each question was open ended to create the opportunity and as much freedom as possible for each interviewed contributor to respond thoroughly and sincerely concerning their perspectives on children's ministry. The interviews followed the predetermined questions, but excursions were allowed where the children's ministry contributors deviated from those questions but provided reflection concerning related areas of children's ministry. Other adjustments during each interview occurred as the interview subjects answered several of the predetermined questions before they were asked. In those instances, the questions were not asked because the interview subjects already provided the desired information.

The validity of the survey was established by submitting the survey consisting of interview questions to an expert panel for review. The panel consisted of individuals possessing academic and professional experience in the field of Christian education and children's ministry. The researcher adapted the interview questions accordingly as the expert panel made recommendations to do so, but some suggestions by the expert panel, had they been implemented, would have broadened the scope of the research beyond a manageable size. In those situations, the first reader was consulted, and changes to the instrument were minimal.

The interviews, whether in person or by telephone, were recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed for summary observations and consistencies or inconsistencies, creating categories of perspectives on children's ministry and a further understanding of contemporary terminology. The content analysis was managed utilizing the qualitative software program *NVivo 8*. The analysis occurred by importing the transcribed content

into the program which allowed for extensive coding and analysis of the data for themes, categories, and terminology.

Procedures

The explanation below is a description of the process utilized to discover the information needed for the research questions. The information collected enabled the researcher to describe the theological presuppositions and educational assumptions of recognized contributors to children's ministry through categorization of their views.

Instrumentation Development

The interviews were guided by questions developed based on the precedent literature concerning major issues in children's ministry. These issues included biblical descriptions and directives concerning children, childhood conversion, developmentalism, insight from general revelation, models of children's ministry, and postmodern concerns for children's ministry. These categories were organized based on the precedent literature. The interviews were managed in five primary sections. The first section was *personal background*. This beginning section consisted of questions that reveal the individuals' journey towards children's ministry including their calling to ministry, and it led them to reflect on their early theological and ministry praxis training.

The second section of the interview was the *theology and philosophy of children's ministry*. Moving from their personal background, the interviews were guided towards the contributors' theological understanding of children and the scriptural basis for their contributions to children's ministry. Philosophy of ministry with children also was the topic of questions in an attempt to discover the contributor's motivations and

methods for ministry though it was possible that theology and philosophy of ministry were intertwined tightly for the interviewees.

The third section of the interview focused on *developmentalism*. This section of questions was designed to allow the contributors' to communicate the influence of developmental concerns on their ministry methodology and curriculum design with children. These questions provided for equal consideration as to whether or not the interviewees have attitudes of acceptance or rejection towards developmental psychology.

Fourth, *the relationship between cultural relevancy and religious traditions* was addressed. These questions were designed to encourage the contributors to discuss their understanding of the concept of cultural relevancy and the role it has in their ministry development. Additionally, questions were asked to investigate the role of religious traditions in their ministry.

The fifth section of the interview consisted of questions concerning *postmodernism*. The questions in this section were developed to provide insight into the contributors' perspectives on cultural shifts towards postmodernism. The interviewees were asked first to describe postmodernism and then to discuss the implications of postmodernism in their ministry with children.

Instrumentation Approval

Before this research investigation was implemented, the researcher completed all forms concerning "Assessment of Risk to Human Research" and made application to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for the approval of the questions to be utilized in the interviews. The instrument also was submitted to the researcher's expert panel for

review and validation. The instrument was approved by the ethics committee and adjustments were made to the instrument as based on the recommendations of the expert panel and advice of the first reader.

Contact with the Significant Contributors to Children's Ministry

Initial contact was made with potential interviewees through email or by letter requesting an appointment with the researcher to conduct the interviews. These letters included an explanation of the research, an agreement to participate form for each contributor to sign and return, and a copy of the research instrument. One week following the mailing, contact was attempted either by telephone or by email as information became available with each potential interviewee to schedule an appointment. Approximately two weeks prior to each scheduled interview, a telephone call or email was made by the researcher to confirm the appoint in case a contributor had forgotten the appointment or a scheduling change had occurred. Once it was recognized that additional recognized contributors to children's ministry needed to be interviewed, a similar contact process was followed. The additional contributors were interviewed in person, and one of the interviews was scheduled and conducted with only one day of lead time due to the willingness and schedule of the recognized contributor involved.

The process of contacting interview subjects was challenging and many of the interview requests went unanswered. At the close of some of the interviews, some participants suggested other contributors to children's ministry that they thought would be available and appropriate for the research as well as the necessary contact information for the researcher to pursue. The total number of participants in the research was 16 which

was sufficient for the qualitative nature of the study. The first interviews consisted of 11 telephone interviews and the in person interviews with additional contributors consisted of 5 interviews. The researcher also offered to provide each contributor with an electronic copy of the results of the research as well as a copy of the transcript of their interview.

Interview Experiences

At the time of each interview, the contributors to children's ministry were called by the researcher at the telephone number provided through prior exchange of letters and email. The researcher had to be flexible when conducting these interviews due to the occasional need for a participant to reschedule the interview. The participants met the opportunity with varying degrees of enthusiasm, but all of the contributors were helpful and willing to labor through the interviews.

The interviews lasted as briefly as thirty minutes and as long as one and a half hours, depending on the conversive nature of the participants. Where the participants followed the outline and interview questions provided to them prior to the interview, the conversation was more brief, but as contributors spoke more freely and shared more in depth explanation of their views along with personal experiences, the interviews went longer. Both approaches proved beneficial to the research process. During the first round, each interview was recorded with a digital recorder through the telephone, downloaded to the researcher's computer, and burned to compact disk. During the in person interviews with additional contributors, the conversations were also recorded with a digital device, downloaded to the researcher's computer, and burned to compact disk. For the sake of confidentiality for the contributors, each interview was assigned a

character designation that was used for the presentation of data such as A, B, C, etc. In person interviews were given a designation such as L2 which indicated the appropriate grouping. The promise of confidentiality was given to provide the contributors more freedom in their responses with less concern for personal and professional conflict or retribution.

Thank You Letter

Upon completion of the interview process, the researcher sent a formal letter of thanks and provided an estimated date that the contributors could expect an electronic copy of the research findings. Upon completion of the dissertation, an electronic copy of the promised information was sent to all interviewees.

Information Management of Interviews

Each interview whether conducted by telephone or in person was recorded with the consent of the contributors. The recordings were transcribed and then downloaded into the *NVivo 8* software for analysis. Summary analysis was done by the researcher to identify major themes common to the children's ministry contributors that related to the research questions (Wolff 2002, 97). A content analysis was also done utilizing qualitative analysis software, specifically *NVivo 8* to discover additional themes as well as identifying consistencies and inconsistencies among the interview contents.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents the research data collected as a result of the interviews with recognized contributors to children's ministry. The data is presented in as clear and unbiased fashion as possible in order to accurately communicate the educational assumptions and theological presuppositions of experts in children's ministry concerning cultural relevancy. Some thematic categories were anticipated based on the research questions, but the researcher also examined the data with the recognition that other, unanticipated categories could be discovered as well.

Compilation Protocol

The data for this research was collected in the form of interviews conducted by telephone and in person. Interviews were first done by telephone and then additional contributors were sought for interviews which were conducted in person. These interviews were recorded for transcription so that they would be prepared for analysis. As each transcript was completed, the data was imported to the *NVivo 7* software, but by the completion of the second round of interviews a software update became available allowing for the use of *NVivo 8*. The software upgrade did not affect the content analysis of the interviews and only involved additional means of presenting data. *NVivo 8* enabled

the researcher to mechanically code the content of the interviews, but doing so required the division of each interview according to *NVivo 8's* heading system. The researcher grouped the content of each interview for comparison of responses according to the five interview categories described in chapter 3. They include personal background, theology and philosophy of children's ministry, developmentalism, relationship between cultural relevancy and religious traditions, and postmodernism. These divisions simply followed the structure of the research instrument. This step proved beneficial not because of any relevant discovery but for the next phase of data analysis which involved the interpretive coding which was done by the researcher.

The second step in the data analysis consisted of the content analysis. Recognizing *a priori* categories based on the research questions, the researcher examined the interviews for related references to the *a priori* categories. When a reference from a given contributor was identified as relevant, that reference was dragged into the corresponding category folder. This process occurred for both the telephone interviews and the in person interviews upon their completion.

A reference included any reflection of any length that was relevant to the *a priori* categories or that were recognized as an emergent category. References were usually at least a sentence, but due to the nature of the interviews, the references often were longer in order to capture the full meaning of the contributors' attitudes and assumptions. The references presented as examples in this chapter were copied directly from the *NVivo* software just as they were coded without changes other than minor formatting for readability or for contributor anonymity. All coded references could not be listed with the presentation of data because of space limitations, but the researcher

provided examples that most clearly demonstrated the observations made.

These first categories which were anticipated due to the research questions included attitudes towards cultural relevancy, theology of children, methodology of ministry, postmodernism in children's ministry, religious traditions, and developmental appropriateness. Additionally, as each first phase interview transcription was read and re-read by the researcher to code the data for the anticipated categories, other definitive themes became apparent within the responses from each contributor to the different questions in the research instrument. These emergent themes were then coded as they were identified by the researcher. With the advent of the second round of interviews with additional contributors the coding process was continued. No additional emergent themes were identified by the researcher other than those previously identified during the first round of interviews.

Following the first two phases of coding, a third phase was implemented to discover deeper meaning within the context of nodes that had already been identified. This coding process involved the researcher examining the *a priori* coding and the emergent categories for possible relationships (Stemler 2205, /getvn.asp?v=7&n=17). The observation of relationships among the categories provided for a better understanding of the coding, themes, and the attitudes and assumptions of the contributors to children's ministry themselves.

The content analysis of the interviews was done utilizing *NVivo* which served to aid the researcher in objectivity and organization of the coding process. *A priori* categories which were based on the five research questions were identified by the researcher and established as nodes in *NVivo* in order to anticipate reflection by the

contributors to children's ministry. The anticipated nodes include cultural relevancy, theology of children, methodology of ministry, postmodernism in children's ministry, and developmental appropriateness. Due to the open and flexible coding process of qualitative research, three of the nodes were restructured. Developmental appropriateness and postmodernism in children's ministry were later moved under methodology of ministry as child nodes, and religious traditions was moved under cultural relevancy because the of the responses given by the interview participants.

Findings and Displays

As the responses were collected and transcribed from the interviews, the information was grouped into the five interview categories in order to provide a means of managing the amount of information received. Summaries of the responses from the children's ministry contributors are presented here followed by specifics of each interview in dialogue format.

A Priori Categories

Because this research was guided by five research questions, it was presumable to the researcher that the most basic themes to be discovered through the interviews of contributors to children's ministry could be found in the research questions themselves. For this reason the researcher identified *a priori* categories before any content analysis was performed. This anticipation of categories from the predetermined research questions created an early framework for coding and guided the initial analysis of the research. The early categories of the coding process and the corresponding research question can be seen in Table 2.

Attitudes of Cultural Relevancy

Coding at the category of attitudes of cultural relevancy occurred at a relatively

Table 2. *A priori* categories drawn from research questions

Research Question	<i>A Priori</i> Category
What are the dominant attitudes towards the role of cultural relevancy of recognized contributors to children's ministry?	1. Attitudes of Cultural Relevancy
What are the dominant theological and philosophical presuppositions concerning children and children's ministry of those that have made recognized contributions to children's ministry?	2. Theology of Children
What are the common themes among the attitudes expressed by the contributing leaders towards cultural relevancy as a determining factor in children's ministry methodology?	3. Methodology of Ministry
Which, if any, classical ministry methods for children are considered by the contributors to be ineffective due to their lack of cultural relevance for a postmodern culture?	4. Postmodernism in Children's Ministry
	5. Religious Tradition
Which, if any, postmodern ministry methods for children are considered by the contributors to be ineffective due to their lack of biblical correctness or developmental appropriateness?	6. Developmental Appropriateness

high level and was only superceded by theology of children and methods of ministry.

Attitudes of cultural relevancy was coded with 112 identified references from the telephone interviews and was possibly an indicator that theological issues of children was more of a concern for the contributors than cultural relevancy. This distinction may have been a result of the specific issues addressed among the theological questions asked of the

contributors. Contributors were asked about their views of the concept of cultural relevancy and the significance of that concept in children's ministry, both in their own ministry and ministry to children in general. Reflections concerning cultural relevancy from the contributors were full of both passion and determination, recognizing cultural relevancy as a necessity of ministry to children, but some also expressed caution not to prioritize cultural immersion excessively if theological integrity was lessened.

The second round of interviews conducted in person with additional contributors to children's ministry was coded at a high rate in relation to the other *a priori* categories, but with less frequency in comparison to the telephone interviews. Of the 6 categories, attitudes of cultural relevancy rated third in frequency with 31 references, but the average percentage of emphasis given to cultural relevancy in each interview was 14.33% for the first interviews and 14.35% for the second group. This percentage rate was generated by the *NVivo* software for each category. Even with the lesser number of references comparatively, the second round contributors gave similar emphasis to cultural relevancy and were very insistent that cultural relevancy was an essential element of children's ministry.

The insistent passion towards the role of cultural relevancy was prominent among the contributors in both rounds of interviews. The issues surfaced throughout the interview process even among other categories. Their insight for being culturally relevant in children's ministry should be helpful in understanding the shape of children's ministry on a broader scale. The following are examples of their views:

We thought that building an inviting building was extremely important for us to be culturally relevant and for it to be a cool place for kids to go, a fun place, a cool

place for the older kids and a fun place for the younger kids, but would also be one that is a little bit timeless [sic]. (Interview J)

I think being a student of culture is essential. If you don't take the time to understand the child, they are going to have the assumption that you don't understand them. (Interview C)

I think relevancy is key in children's ministry because our culture is changing and the real challenge of the children's minister is to take timeless truths and present them in a culturally relevant way to the current generation of kids. (Interview G)

The men of Issachar were wise because they understood the times and they acted accordingly. In all of your cultural relevancy and religious traditions . . . if we are not culturally relevant we are doomed to failure because we are not wise. If we cannot get their attention and talk to them about spiritual principles in a way that will stick to them then we are lost [sic]. Cultural relevancy is completely important. (Interview M2)

While the above selections demonstrate very positive attitudes towards cultural relevancy, other contributors expressed a concern for a balanced approach to cultural relevancy. These contributors acknowledged the need for cultural relevancy and often seemed passionate about it, but their reflections were tempered with a definite concern for theology and doctrine as can be seen in the following excerpts:

I think you need to go all out without contradicting any principles or truths in God's Word. I think you need to go all out . . . I think you need to embrace our culture and what is culturally relevant. What is Nickelodeon doing? What is the Disney Channel doing? What is Sports Illustrated for kids saying? Looking at those culturally current venues that seem to be connected with kids, I'm gonna look at those venues or medium, how can I embrace as much as I can without contradicting any principle or truth in God's Word [sic]. (Interview D)

You have got to do things that take the Bible to the people. With children I feel like you've got to make it relevant and attractive. There are so many things that compete for their attention and the important thing is that the message stays the same but how we present it is what can change. If DVD's or computer games are the culture that they are in, it's okay to use those things as long as our focus and our message is the same. Our method of presenting it is different. (Interview O2)

We recognize that we need to be on the cutting edge. We need to stop playing catch up ball. We need to stop being so slow to adapt to things. I think . . . fundamentally

here's our problem. We Christians tend to lack discernment and we don't have the ability or at least we are not asking God for the ability to separate those eternally significant things that are unchangeable or we shouldn't be changing. (Interview F)

The attempt to code at attitudes of cultural relevancy was to look for any and all references concerning attitudes of cultural relevancy among the interviews. The intent of coding was to gain a broad spectrum view of how contributors to children's ministry approached issues of cultural relevancy as well as how those attitudes influenced or were influenced by the other categories. The content analysis did provide insight into the attitudes of contributors towards cultural relevancy, but the relationships between their views and other categories were also insightful.

Theology of Children

Coding at the theology of children node occurred at a relatively high rate of 124 references among the first round of interviews. While this high coding rate was a possible indicator of the priority of theological concerns among the contributors, it was also anticipated to have a high coding rate because of the section of questions directly addressing theological concerns in children's ministry. These questions were designed for the contributors to address the issues of the sin nature of children, salvation of children, baptism of children, spiritual nurturing of children, parental responsibility for children, church responsibility for children, community responsibility for children, and cultural influences of children. For example all respondents shared a theological presupposition that children need to be saved just as one contributor concisely described, "The sin nature of children. Children are human beings, too, and obviously we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and I think it's pretty clear in the Word that

we're born into sin as a result of Adam's fall. Kids are no different" (Interview E).

Other theological issues addressed by the contributors were limited not specifically to the theological section of the research instrument, but could be seen throughout their interview responses. In Interview G, when discussing religious traditions in contrast to cultural relevancy, the contributor again affirms the theology of soteriology in relation to children:

I think definitely the idea of . . . I think sin and salvation is huge [sic]. Kids need to be, no matter what the setting, they need to be confronted with the fact that sin is a part of life, it's something that we are all predisposed to, that there's a penalty for that and that God offers us a gift that we need to accept. I think giving kids an opportunity to publicly profess that faith in Christ will solidify that decision and that's where baptism is important. I think there is definitely a place for, no matter what cultural setting we're in, to talk about the price that Christ paid for our salvation. (Interview G)

Additionally the contributors were asked to extrapolate how these theological issues impacted the design of their ministry with children.

Coding for theology of children among the additional contributors in the second group occurred at the rate of 33 references. This was the second highest category among the second group unlike the first round where theology ranked highest, but the average percentage rate of emphasis among each interview was 16.83% among the first group and 15.06% among the second group, demonstrating an observable, comparable concern. All of the contributors in the second group expressed an evangelical concern for children to be converted and to experience Christian discipleship, or as one contributor described:

I have to understand that when Adam and Even sinned, that sin came into the world and that our kids were born with that sin nature and we don't have to teach them to disobey us. They let me know that they know that already. So going along with that is the aspect that God loved us so much that He provided a forgiveness for that sin

and so moving into the fact that you have that sin nature but thankfully we have an option to get over that [sic]. (Interview P2)

The theological findings were important for two reasons. First, the positions expressed by the contributors in both groups confirmed that they fit the population of the study as all contributors in both groups expressed evangelical, conversionist theology. Furthermore, all contributors expressed a position affirming baptism by immersion only for a child after conversion, the child's parents, and the church are in agreement that the child is ready. While baptism by immersion was not considered a requirement for the population, even those contributors who attended a church where immersion was not practiced expressed an unsolicited affirmation of it. Second, the coding of the theological positions revealed a variety of motivations for ministry to children that often intertwined with other categories such as attitudes of cultural relevancy and, in particular, methodology of ministry. This interconnectedness of the categories was the primary factor for the researcher to discover the role of relationships between nodes as a significant aspect of the data and will be addressed later in this chapter.

Methodology of Ministry

While methodology of ministry was not a specific section of the research instrument, it was a dominant issue in each of the five areas of questions so it was identified as an *a priori* category. Methodology of ministry is the category with the largest amount of coding in either the telephone or in person interview groups with 147 and 38 references respectively. The percentage of emphasis given to methodology was higher among the in person interviews with an average of 19.66%, but the in person interviews was similar with 17.80%.

The most likely explanation for the large amount of coding is the natural relationship between philosophy, theology, and practical application. As the contributors answered questions in each section, reflecting on their ministries, they discussed not just why they do ministry but also how they do ministry. Some contributors in particular were very specific about the programming choices, policies, and procedures within their ministries. For example, in Interview E the contributor discussed a method of helping parents whose children are involved in the contributor's congregation as he described:

But in an ideal world, I believe the parent needs to be the principal spiritual instructor. We try to facilitate every parent that comes. We try to give them the tools they need. Every week we have a family devotion that we send home that helps the parents understand what we talked about that week and give them a word for word devotion that they lead their kid in [sic]. (Interview E)

In some instances the contributors discussed methodology in negative terms such as in Interview I when developmentalism was actually being discussed and the contributor expressed concern for programming without direction by saying:

We don't really have a developmental theory in educational environments. We think we do but churches have no direction. They will look at someone else and say they've got AWANA. They've got 200 kids coming so we're going to have AWANA. (Interview I)

It is necessary to note that the contributor was not being critical of the AWANA program but of using any program without direction. For the purposes of coding the reference was identified as an issue of methodology albeit an identification of faulty methodology within a church's children's ministry.

Postmodernism in Children's Ministry

The category of postmodernism in children's ministry seemed to be much more nebulous as many of the contributors in both groups struggled to define the concept much

less identify any impact of postmodernism in children's ministry. Coding occurred at the rate of 41 references in the first group and 10 references in the second group. The average percentage of emphasis per interview remained consistent as well with 4.45% in the first group and 4.51% in the second group. This lower number of coding and percentages is most likely the result of uncertainty expressed by some of the contributors as to the meaning of the term postmodernism. Where the contributor offered no substantive answer, the researcher moved to the next question in the interview.

They made comments such as "I really don't know. Like when I read that a couple of weeks ago after you sent me this it started me thinking 'what is the definition of postmodernism?'" (Interview P2) and "I am a postmodern idiot. I've never taken the time to really look at it and dissect it" (Interview B). Others asked for more of an explanation about postmodernism like a definition for the term, but the researcher encouraged the contributors to respond according to their impression of the concept. The responses were varied and also included views that the researcher interpreted with some being positive towards ministry, skeptical of postmodernism as true phenomena, and concerned about the implications of postmodernism. These descriptions were based on excerpts like the following which were identified as skeptical of postmodernism as a phenomena:

You know that postmodern is merely the currently label for the reality of an ever changing culture that is happening all the time. And so I think the label postmodern is just a current label that's being used. It has so many variations so many things have clung to postmodernism as far as some things that are good and some things that paint postmodernism as being a dark sinister plot by the evil one to get people away from the church [sic]. I don't think either are true. I think it's just, it's the current label of an every changing culture, and I think what's going to happen is in the coming couple of years you're going to find something past postmodernism that will come along. (Interview K)

To be honest, I don't prefer that term because it means so much it means nothing [sic]. I think people get confused. Some people I think get confused with postmodernism when the whole epistemology piece of how do people learn. I reject the notion that truth is relative. But I think most people when you talk about postmodernism in the church don't believe that additive. I'd be more of a foundationalist. I just think it is a worthless term. (Interview C)

In contrast, other interviews revealed contributors as being very concerned about postmodernism:

In a postmodern world I am a bible thumper. I am a [contributor] who is firmly convinced that there is a God, and He did give us absolutes and Jesus is the one and only way to heaven. I can't be dissuaded from that. We are convinced we are followers of the Lord Jesus. We feel compelled by the great commission to go and make disciples of all men and we better go and start young because of what Barna says. If these kids don't hear the gospel and respond to the gospel by the time they are 8 years old . . . if we don't share it the opportunity that they will come to God later in life is drastically reduced. I have this raging bonfire about it. (Interview M2)

Obviously, in its root, postmodernism is an absolute continued rejection of the Judeo-Christian ethic. It is society continuing to alienate itself in fact to become altogether hostile toward the Bible and for those who would be followers of the Way of Jesus Christ. I think that postmodernism has swept Western culture, it dominates Western culture, and thus it ultimately influences the way that we even think here in America. (Interview F)

Others were positive about the opportunity to do children's ministry in the context of postmodernism:

The church I think with acting the way it did 40 years ago, the church would be extinct. Churches do move and absorb and flex and I think when a church moves to harness the postmodern group of folks I think that is a good move. (Interview K)

The thing that excites me the most about postmodernism is the emphasis on relationship, that we love spiritual laws, we love logical approaches and arguments and politics and those things don't work with postmodern and in some ways that kind of puts us feeling like a fish out of water because we are so used to being able to argue people into our faith, but I think the advantages then – hey I'm not sure how successful I really was [sic]. I think we over-estimate how effectively we are arguing people into the kingdom of God. (Interview A)

While initial review of the postmodernism category and coding revealed several perspectives of the contributors towards this issue, the more significant attitudes were uncertainty and a general lack of importance for postmodernism. Due to the initial findings the researcher moved postmodernism as an *a priori* category under the category of cultural relevancy because of the relationship nodes which emerged later in the analysis.

Religious Tradition

Religious tradition was an *a priori* category identified with the anticipation that the contributors could have identified religious traditions that were valued either by the contributor personally or by the local congregation or denomination. Coding occurred at a lower rate of 25 references in the telephone interviews and 10 references in the in person interviews, but the in person interviews with additional contributors showed a higher percentage of 4.82% for emphasis on religious tradition compared to the first group with a percentage rate of 2.34%. An aspect of investigating the attitudes and assumptions of contributors to children's ministry is considering whether or not they hold to any time honored traditions that would be considered the antitheses to cultural relevancy. The specific question in the research instrument was intended to encourage a response on this issue and did so. The responses were quite similar among both groups.

The contributors offered reflections of their own religious traditions which included prayer, prayer walking, prayer journaling, corporate prayer, Bible intake and application, sharing faith, Sunday School, missions education, liturgy, meaningful worship, inter-generational worship, Christmas and Easter emphasis, community, and

doctrinal teaching. Even with these references toward religious traditions, some caution was expressed that traditions should direct children toward Jesus, recognizing that not everyone is familiar with the various practices. A contributor in the second round identified what he saw as religious traditions but then tempered his response by expressing a particular concern:

We have the sacraments. To teach those and to lead the kids in those are incredibly . . . you have to [sic]. Those are the vehicles that Jesus said this is my body, this is my blood. Why wouldn't you take advantage of that tradition? Baptism . . . yes. Traditions of worship, traditions of listening to someone herald the word and sitting under that, traditions of missions, traditions of blessing the poor and the sick, traditions of blessing yourself . . . these are all things the church has been about for a long time. . . . Whether the piano goes on one side and the organ goes on the other, whether you've got live drums or drum pads . . . those are divisive things and it just doesn't make a hill of beans difference. Those type of traditions . . . whether you wear robes or not, whether or not you can wear baseball caps in the sanctuary as long as you keep them pointed forward. There are traditions that are born of religion and religion is always a matter of measuring up [sic]. (Interview L2)

Developmental Appropriateness

The section devoted to questions concerning developmentalism in the research instrument was designed to discover the views of the contributors concerning childhood development theory, but the contributors in both groups responded with less depth in their views on developmentalism than anticipated by the researcher. There was subsequently a lower rate of coding for this category with 70 references in the first round and 20 references in the second. The average percentage rate for emphasis among each interview was very similar with rates of 8.28% in the telephone interviews and 8.35% among the in person interviews. When necessary the researcher moved through some of the interview questions because of the more limited responses from contributors.

All of the contributors to some extent discussed their views of developmentalism, but the preliminary observation of the researcher was the awareness of cognitive development differences by age, communicating with children in a way they can understand, and the comparison of spiritual development to physical development. A unique factor within the second round of contributors was the specific ministries of three of the contributors, two of which focused on preschool ages and one on children in 4th, 5th, and 6th grades. These contributors recognized a definitive need to apply developmental principles to their ministry, but it did not significantly increase the percentage of emphasis among their interviews.

Two important examples of this occurrence was seen in Interviews K and O2. In Interview K the contributor described his personal views of developmentalism and in Interview O2 the contributor explained how developmentalism helped her understanding of the children in the target audience:

Jesus loves me this I know pathway [sic]. That has shaped our ministry in terms of as we identified or put some mile markers along the pathway. What's happened is that it's given each one of our rooms by age an indicator as far as what are they supposed to accomplish with kids or what can they expect to accomplish with kids and what's the progression on it. (Interview K)

Of course, it's very gradual. There are differences between the way boys develop and girls develop as far as their interest and their fine motor skills and things like that. Maturity levels are different. Then there are certain things in teaching preschool, parents would be so concerned about their children acting a certain way. I can guarantee you when they said that their child was three and a half. At this age they seem to act out. There are certain things that hit, and you have to keep in mind that children are different. They are individual. They are not going to mature at the same level. Their interests are going to be different. (Interview O2)

A Priori Categories by Interview

Looking at each category and the coding results provided insight into the

attitudes and assumptions of contributors towards cultural relevancy, but an additional view of the data also provided insight into the potential importance of the categories. In Table 3 and 4, the frequency of coding at each category was provided and displayed by interviews. Table 3 displays the coding frequencies and percentage rates for the telephone interviews, and Table 4 displays the data from the in person interviews.

The frequency was indicated by two numbers in each cell. The first number was the number of references coded by the researcher at that node, and the second number was the percentage of coding from the given interview. For example, Interview A contained 12 references relevant to attitudes of cultural relevancy, and that number of references consisted of 14.75% of the total content for Interview A. This was expressed in Table 3 as 12/14.75. The last row of Tables 3 and 4 show the averages of the coding for each category

At a base level, the higher the references and percentages, the greater the time given to that issue by the contributors during their interviews. The priority given to an issue in an individual category as a part of the interview in its entirety is reflected in the percentage rate. Additionally, the percentage rates were beneficial in demonstrating consistency in coding by comparing the averages between the two groups of interviews. It was helpful by providing confirmation as to which categories appeared with the greatest frequency and which categories had the greatest frequency by interview, but it is not possible to determine the deeper level of meaning for the contributors by viewing the frequency rates alone. The deeper meaning was better identified by examining the context and content of the coded references.

Emergent Categories

While the researcher examined the interview data from the telephone interviews on a line by line basis in order to code at the *a priori* categories, other themes became apparent as the research progressed. Those themes were identified and were created within the software as free nodes. As the coding process continued, these emergent codes were adjusted into the hierarchical structure by placing the emergent

Table 3. *A priori* references and percentages of coding by telephone interviews

Int.	Cat. 1	Cat. 2	Cat. 3	Cat. 4	Cat. 5	Cat. 6
A	12/14.75	8/11.69	6/7.23	4/4.85	1/0.82	7/9.90
B	14/22.26	5/8.13	13/18.12	3/1.57	1/0.44	5/6.11
C	8/13.87	13/25.57	8/14.37	4/5.89	2/2.82	7/14.97
D	8/14.19	6/15.26	2/6.74	2/4.72	1/4.39	2/4.21
E	13/17.58	8/11.94	18/26.88	6/6.93	4/2.95	3/3.35
F	8/8.25	14/15.81	17/15.33	6/6.32	1/2.67	3/1.96
G	12/19.31	12/17.51	12/17.78	4/5.09	2/3.39	5/7.72
H	9/13.17	13/24.88	12/20.81	2/0.97	2/2.11	11/17.45
I	11/6.69	14/10.17	27/15.54	4/2.31	7/2.97	13/8.18
J	9/16.46	23/33.38	16/28.33	4/4.4	2/1.64	10/12.60
K	9/11.18	8/10.80	16/24.74	3/5.94	2/1.64	4/4.68
	10.27/14.33	11.27/16.83	13.36/17.80	3.80/4.45	2.27/2.34	6.36/8.28

themes under the *a priori* categories as deemed appropriate. These emergent categories were coded at much lower rates than the originally anticipated categories, but the emergent categories provided more nuance to the attitudes and assumptions of the

contributors. Upon completion of interviews with additional children's ministry experts, the content was coded at the emergent themes previously identified, and no new themes were identified. Table 5 was created to provide a summary of the emergent categories as well as an example of the coding from which each category emerged.

Table 4. *A priori* references and percentages of coding by in person interviews

Int.	Cat. 1	Cat. 2	Cat. 3	Cat. 4	Cat. 5	Cat. 6
L2	5/9.24	9/21.67	8/18.79	3/9.73	3/9.73	4/7.78
M2	4/12.51	8/17.84	3/7.07	3/7.73	4/6.01	5/7.25
N2	7/19.46	4/6.64	6/20.40	2/2.81	1/1.38	3/9.80
O2	4/11.05	5/15.49	3/11.73	1/1.80	1/2.14	5/12.17
P2	11/19.51	7/13.67	18/40.35	1/0.51	3/4.87	3/4.77
	6.2/14.35	6.6/15.06	7.6/19.66	2/4.51	2.4/4.82	4/8.35

Each of these categories have also been addressed here to provide additional insight into their importance.

Media

The use of media in children's ministry was specifically addressed in the interview questions under the category of postmodernism in children's ministry. The significance of this theme was seen in the answers to the specific question, but other insightful references were made concerning the use of media throughout the interviews as well. Coding at media included references to a wide range of visual and audio forms of communication with children. It also included references to the latest technology in

Table 5. Emergent categories discovered in interview data

Contextual Reference	Emergent Category
“Media is the number 1 influence because we are all plugged in to our own media.” (Interview I)	1. Media
“If you are using flannel graph with 6 th grade in the United States you have a problem . . . Now we look at it as a little bit antiquated. Now people are looking at video and going well . . . it’s what flannel was 40 years ago.” (Interview B)	2. Classic Children’s Methodology
“I just really felt God’s call and Him saying I know you don’t feel like you have these skills but I am going to make this happen. I just said, okay, I’m being obedient and I put my name in for that. I’ve been the children’s pastor ever since.” (Interview J)	3. Call to Ministry
“Children’s ministry people who get a degree in children’s ministry and then go into children’s ministry are very rare.” (Interview A)	4. Education of Contributors
“But when I was 15 I gave my life to the Lord.” (Interview E)	5. Salvation Experience
“I mean, Proverbs 22:6 that children are to be raised up by their parents.” (Interview F)	6. Parental Responsibility
“. . . I don’t think you can actually take the concepts from the Bible and apply them to today without showing their relevancy . . .” (Interview K)	7. Apologetic of Cultural Relevancy

media as well as references to more low tech approaches. The references to media among both groups reflected a perceivable spectrum of attitudes towards the use of media which included preferences of quality of media used, balanced use of media as a method of communication, and media as an essential means of being cultural relevant in children’s ministry. In comparing the coding of both interview groups, data from both groups were coded at a low frequency of 36 for round 1 and 10 for round 2. The average percentage of emphasis given to media among the interviews was 4.62% and 3.57% respectively.

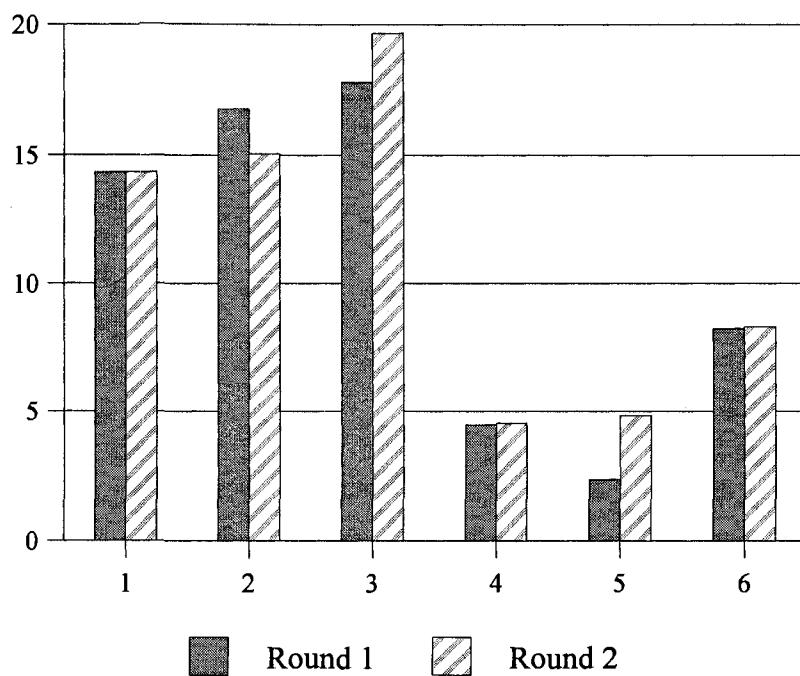


Figure 1. Visual comparison of *a priori* coding average percentage rates

Interview B revealed an attitude of necessity towards the use of media in children's ministry. Early in the interview under the category of personal background the contributor described the significance of media in the contributor's current vision of media:

That's why I'm a big proponent of video based curriculum because kids can actually take that with them and share it with their friends. So the curriculum doesn't become stagnant [sic]. It becomes viral. Kids are sharing it at school. They're watching it on vacation. It's not a one time, one place thing. (Interview B)

This contributor went on to emphasize the potential to reach more children with the use of media:

One really big thing is obviously the proliferation of I-Pods and Zooms and phones that can stream video and the age at which these kids have these things in their pocket. I read an article the other day I think it was in Kid's Screen. I think it was 6 months ago where it talked about if I-Pods, just Apple continue to sell at the rate . . . it's like everyone on the planet by the year 2010 will have an I-Pod [sic].

That's staggering and so now just with the release of the I-Light for Mac, I don't know if you use Mac, but it's any easy way basically to convert any video that you have through their new program . . . there are revamping their new program I-Movie . . . to push it up to Youtube. (Interview B)

Another contributor in Interview C expressed concern for a balanced approach to the use of media in order to not hinder the formation of relationships between teachers and children or the children themselves:

We have to account for that and realize that if we are going to reach them we have to use more visual methods. That's a form of being culturally relevant, but like I mentioned earlier, that if we pop in the half hour long DVD that came out of a mega church we are instead of them interacting with a discipler they are interacting with a children's pastor they are never going to meet [sic]. They sit in front of the screen, and their effort to be culturally relevant can overtake the mission. (Interview C)

In the second round of interviews, a contributor whose ministry centers around media also expressed a balanced concern for the role of media as a means of communication:

I don't think you have to have a TV or a projector in a church to be relevant. You could use clips from movies if you are trying to illustrate something. It doesn't have to be big and fancy, but if you are aware of what they see and what they listen to and you speak to them in accordance with that. Listen to this or look at this and then let's see what the Bible says [sic]. What do you do? Media can be a great tool but it is not the tool. Jesus used object lessons. Media is an object lesson. You can do an object lesson with this. We just happened to take a picture of this. Any ministry can do that. It's just a principle. (Interview N2)

These excerpts reflected the ends of the spectrum expressed by the contributors concerning the use of media. The bulk of the responses acknowledged a need for the use of media in children's ministry, and in particular they recognized the importance of media to be culturally relevant and appealing to children. Several of the respondents did temper their attitude towards media with cautionary limit where media might distract from the importance of the message being communicated.

Classic Children's Methodology

Classic Children's Methodology was defined by the researcher in chapter one as a broad concept that encompasses many children's ministry methods describing the reaching and ministering to children that were widely implemented in the church over the last several years and are revered for their longevity but not necessarily for their effectiveness. It was actually an element of research question 4 which asks, "Which, if any, classical ministry methods for children are considered by the contributors to be ineffective due to their lack of cultural relevance for a postmodern culture?" The researcher did not identify classical children's methods as an *a priori* category because the issues of cultural relevancy and postmodernism were anticipated to be more dominant. Coding for classic methodology occurred at a rate of 30 references in round 1 but at an even lower rate of 4 references in round 2, and the average percentages of emphasis were 3.12% and 1.33%.

Based on the definition of classic method's provided in chapter 1, the references coded at classic children's methodology included a few main topics: Sunday School, AWANA, Vacation Bible School, mission education, children's choirs, puppets, and flannel graph. All of these topics when referenced were spoken of with both affection and concern as can be seen in some their comments:

We're still doing children's choir and missions and we're still calling Sunday School, Sunday School. The word doesn't even make sense. It's worse than Saturday School. We're still in the 60's, maybe the 70's. We're not speaking a child's language. A child is being entertained and wired all week electronically and technologically and they walk in to this wonderful flannel graph presentation and they kind of melt down. (Interview I)

Large group, small group works great in the one hour church context, but you can't do children's church for an hour and then Sunday School for an hour. Children need

large group relationships and small group [sic]. If I were to waive my context and go to a context where I only had one hour a week, I would do large group, small group in a heart beat. If I give most of my kids two hours a week I don't. I think the children's minister has the freedom to cut and paste. My large church is so unique. I have to modify everything to match the vision of the house. All that to say is that I don't know if there is one model . . . one size doesn't fit all. (Interview C)

I have not used it personally, but I like the rotation Sunday School where the children are moved from different areas. They have puppets, drama, computer. That would be an effective thing because it has an appeal to the children. That is what we need to do. We need to update the church. I think the church gets the leftover. I don't think that is being fair to God. If you are capable of doing more, I think we should do more. We've got the resources. (Interview O2)

The contributors that addressed these issues valued these elements and their historic use in children's ministry but also recognized the need for relevance to today's children. Of these issues, flannel graph which is a visual storytelling aid that utilized felt characters and scenes to teach biblical truths, was recognized as passe.

Call to Ministry

The emergence of the call to ministry category was an interesting observation made by the researcher. This category was a result of the sections of questions concerning personal background in the research instrument and shares a similarity to the childhood spiritual development of the contributors as discussed previously. Coding occurred at the rates of 11 first round references and 24 second round references, and the percentages ratio was also proportionately higher for the round 2. The distinction between coding for round two was a result of Interview M2 where a much more detailed description of the contributor's calling was offered, and the call to ministry of the contributor was frequently referenced as the motivation and context of much of the contributor's ministry methodology:

One of the ladies that I met . . . is a songwriter for [the contributor's ministry]. She loaned me her rocking chair when my son was born and we just became friends. She had written a lot of big worship songs that [the contributor's ministry] used "We Believe". She had written some songs on an "I Love You" CD that was lullabies. She had collaborated with some other song writers and put these together. That went so well and it won a Dove award. She decided to write some songs for some preschool children. She wrote a CD called lap songs for little ones. About the time my kids were 1 and 2, she came to see me one day. She had an idea that we have a woman character for all these songs that I have written. I think we should call this woman [stage name] because one of the songs they have written is called [stage name]. That was a way to marry the scriptures together with the song, "clap your hands all ye people". I said that was a great idea. She said she had been praying about it for a month and every time I pray you're the only person that God brings to my mind. She said I think you are [stage name]. (Interview M2)

With every interview in both groups, the contributors expressed some point in their lives where they were exposed to children's ministry and its possibilities. Based on that exposure to children's ministry, they devoted themselves to it even though some of the contributors were initially reluctant to do so. This was another indicator of the attitudes of the contributors toward their individual approaches to children's ministry. The distinction to be made is when this exposure and eventual calling occurred in the lives of the contributors. Referring to figure one, the contributors that recalled an early childhood conversion and spiritual nurturing seemed to be influenced to do children's ministry at a younger age. This influence came from their parents, a significant individual in their lives, or the church itself. For example, in Interview E the contributor clearly recalled the individual that influenced the call of children's ministry:

When I was in must have been 4th grade, I had a lady who was the children's minister at the church, she wasn't paid full time by the church, she didn't have any real training in children's ministry, she couldn't juggle, she couldn't sing, she couldn't do much of anything [sic]. But what she could do was love kids. She was the only teacher that I ever had that when I walked in the door she didn't turn and run away or ignore me and say sit down. She would always come and put her arm around me and tell me I'm gonna do something big for God one day. Honestly, that was a turning point for me. I think not only spiritually because I've never forgotten

that time and that moment even though many years went by and I was you know definitely not living for the Lord . . . completely the opposite. But when I was 15 I gave my life to the Lord. And she, her name was Ms. Candy, which I think is just awesome for a children's pastor to be named Candy, that's just so cool. Kids automatically love you, I guess. She really made a big, big difference in my life and so much so that I remembered it even in my teenage years. (Interview E)

Of those that did not become a Christian until adulthood or young adulthood, the contributors recounted an unexpected discovery process that they identified as God's calling to children's ministry. They also recount similar impressions of their unexpected nature of their calling:

So, limited experience with children's ministry but in California that's when the lights came on and I began to realize I was a part of the old missiological mind set that the way you reach a community is you reach out to adults and they'll bring kids with them when they come to church [sic]. If that isn't the most idiotic, ideological mis-connected [ideal] I've ever seen because adults are 10 to 20 times more difficult to reach than kids. We have discovered that if you reach out to kids and youth in the community especially if you're going to plant a church they'll bring their parents with them faster than parents will bring their kids. (Interview F)

Then clearly through some different circumstances felt God speaking to me and saying you need to do this [sic]. Be obedient to me. I just really felt God's call and Him saying I know you don't feel like you have these skills but I am going to make this happen. I just said, okay, I'm being obedient and I put my name in for that. I've been the children's pastor ever since. (Interview J)

Education of Contributors

Educational backgrounds of the contributors as a question in the research instrument did not reveal specific data related to the research questions. The contributors were asked about their theological and ministry education or praxis, and the results from the telephone interviews included nine contributors that attended a Christian college or university for undergraduate education, three attended a secular university, and five of the contributors also went to seminary for additional education. One of the contributors was

pursuing a doctor of philosophy in education at the time of the contributor's interview.

This resulted in a coding rate of 16 reference at the education node. This was similar to the education of those in the in person interviews. Three of the second round contributors went to Christian college, and two of them earned degrees at secular universities. One contributor also went to seminary and was pursuing a Ph. D. from a Christian institution. This resulted in a coding rate of 8 references.

Salvation Experience

The salvation experience as an emergent code primarily served as a confirmation of the evangelical requirement for the population. It also served to help triangulate responses from some of the contributors as their conversion experience offered a degree of possible motivation for the children's ministry in which they were involved at the time of the interviews. An example of the benefit of the introductory questions could be seen directly in Interview K. The contributor in Interview K notes that the direct attention given to introducing children to Christ in the contributor's ministry is highly determined by the lack of a similar experience as a child:

I'm passionate that they're missing the boat because I was a kid who went to church every day through my elementary years and I emerged from church without a relationship with Jesus and went on a life journey that I am not proud of. I look at it and I think, you know what . . . I was in the house of God in a children's ministry every 7 days and nobody bothered to help me become a Christ follower and change my life and give my life to Jesus [sic]. They just taught me a bunch of stories and tried to convince me to behave and so my passion is all about calling people back to what I believe is the essence of church work and that is to help people, and it's little people in this case, start a relationship with Jesus and then help them figure out how they live life as a Christ follower in a 4th grade body . . . (Interview K)

At least in the case of this contributor, what was deemed a tragic oversight in the contributor's childhood significantly influenced the direction and methodology of the

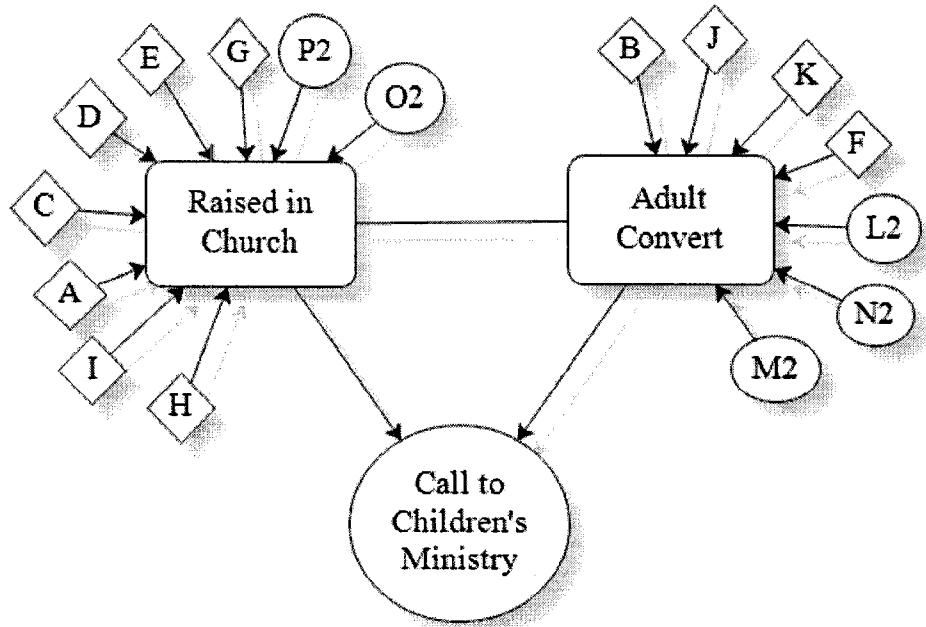


Figure 2. Comparison of Personal Background of Contributors

contributor's children's ministry today. A second round contributor identified a connection to ministry motivation due to the lack of discipleship following conversion to Christ:

I find that is so ironic that something that I did not get as a child that God is now using to call me into children's ministry. That is one of my best things that I like to do for kids and anytime that a kid makes a profession of faith, we involve parents going through the new Christian class. In fact we require one parent to go through the class with the kids. As a kid, that is something that I missed, and I don't want kids to miss that. (Interview P2)

Though the questions related to personal background did not directly lead to answers for the research questions they did provide peripheral insight into motivations for the contributors entry into children's ministry and for some of the emphases of their given ministries. The questions also aided in triangulating the answers given by contributors

throughout the interviews in that the contributors gave consistent responses throughout the interviews.

Parental Responsibility

In the theology sections of the research instrument parental nurturing was one of several issues which contributors were asked to address, but their responses were not limited to this one place in the interview. The references occurred throughout the interviews in addition to the specific question. As the researcher examined the content of the first round of interviews, the prevalence of parenting issues became obvious, and the node, parental responsibility, was created. Coding at this node occurred at the rate of 52 references with the average percentage of emphasis per interview being 5.17%. While there were varied levels of concern and passion over this issue, Interview F revealed the strongest and most frequent concerns with 11 references. This was 4 more references than the next most frequent occurrence of coding.

In the second round of interviews parental responsibility was coded at 9 references, but there was a visible similarity to the coding in round one. The highest number of references among round two was 5 references as seen in Interview P2. This was 3 higher than the next highest interview. Even with this distinction, the average percentage of emphasis per interview of 5.91% was slightly higher than the average discovered in round one interviews.

There were extensive references to parental responsibility in relation to children's ministry. The references reflected an affirming theological support for the role of parents and the recognition of the need for the local church to encourage and enable

parents to assume responsibility for the spiritual guidance of their children. Concerns expressed by the contributors included criticism of the church's lack of support and training for parents, togetherness of the family during worship, the role of the children's pastor in lieu of parental involvement, and the basic, biblical need for parents to lead their children. Interview F in the first round and P2 in second round contained the most direct and passionate responses as the contributors expressed concern for the usurping of parental responsibility, though not necessarily intentional, by the church:

We're gonna boldly communicate to the Christians in America that we've missed the boat and that we've lost a generation or two and that if you keep whacking away down to the root of this problem we'll discover that the church has unfortunately been acting as a spiritual surrogate for disconnected parents who are lacking knowledge and instruction and understanding as to biblical parenting 101 [sic]. (Interview F)

So imagine with me the typical parents who are in over their heads not really knowing what to do about this parenting dilemma. They drop their kids off at the front doors of the church and they say to the church, "This is your responsibility . . . handle it." The tragedy isn't that parents do that because anybody in over their heads obviously is going to try and unload the crisis on somebody they feel is capable. The problem is the church is completely incapable of raising spiritual champions by and large without the input of the parents. (Interview F)

I am putting more emphasis on parent education than I am on just doing the fun stuff with kids. We still do that, but we are offering a lot more parent education and every parent class that I start, we start with Deuteronomy passage where it says "parents teach these things to your kids." God holds us as parents to be responsible, and I don't want to give the spiritual education of my two daughters over to someone else. I want to take responsibility for that myself. And it has been interesting because I found that parents keep saying 'I want to do that but I don't know how to do that. I don't know how to have a quiet time with my kids' [sic]. Does that mean that we have to sit down an hour and read the Bible? There are other options. (Interview P2)

Not of all of the contributors focused on the issue of parenting to the extent that could be seen in Interview F, but they did express similar concern.

An Apologetic of Cultural Relevancy

Throughout the process of examining the interviews for relevant references, the researcher noticed a tension among the responses provided by the contributors as they expressed their views on theology and cultural relevancy. The contributors, within their own interviews, bantered between reaching children and their families by being culturally relevant and not being so “hip,” as one contributor described it, that the clear message of Jesus was compromised (Interview A). They expressed biblical grounds for this dichotomy as well as examples of their efforts to reach children. The researcher initially identified this emergent category as a theology of cultural relevancy, but that title for this node had broader implications than what was intended. An apologetic of cultural relevancy more closely identified the theme discovered as a result of the coding process. This category was coded at a rate of 41 references among the first interviews with an average percentage rate of emphasis of 4.64%, and the second round was coded at 5 references with an average percentage rate of 2.02%.

The contributors described their beliefs and practices to be both biblical and culturally relevant, and their passion and concern were quite evident. Of the coded samples presented, the mingling of biblical principles and the need to be culturally relevant was quite apparent:

Being contemporary, being effective, being genuine [sic]. The Jesus Principle. When He met people on the road, or when He was in a boat doing parables to those people on the shore or crowded around Him, He did not speak in theorems or out there in rocket science. He spoke language. He knew their hurt. (Interview I)

You know Paul said that we are to be all things to all men so that they might be reached and children’s ministry to me is cross-cultural ministry so my passion is to equip adults to not defeat kid knowledge but to relate to them within the context of the culture. I mean Jesus did that. He used current stories, he used current issues,

the object lessons that Jesus taught were from the agricultural culture and fishing culture of that day but it is absolutely critical that we minister to kids within the context of their culture. (Interview A)

I was at a church in Florida and if I wasn't a Christian, I couldn't have related to these people at all. They were so isolated from mainstream culture that it was painful. Anyone coming to their church would first have to become like them before they even had a hope of becoming like Jesus. To me, it's getting the middle man out of the way and saying the same message that Jesus came in flesh, died on the cross, rose from the dead but saying it in such a way that the people of a particular culture can hear that [sic]. That is the first thing successful missionaries do. They'll learn the language. They don't make the people that they go to first learn the language of the missionary. (Interview L2)

Frequency of Emergent Categories

The emergence of the new nodes provided for a better understanding of the attitudes and assumptions of contributors towards cultural relevancy, but the information gleaned was more subtle than the *a priori* categories. The quantitative display of the data also provided insight into the potential importance of the new categories. In Tables 6 and 7, the frequency of coding at each emergent category was provided and displayed by interviews. The frequency was indicated by two numbers in each cell. The first number was the number of references coded by the researcher at that node, and the second number was the percentage of coding from the given interview. For example, Interview A contained 5 references relevant to parental responsibility and that number of references consisted of 6.86% of the total interview content. This is expressed in Table 6 as 5/6.86. The last row of both tables demonstrates the average number of references per category and the average percentage rate of emphasis per category.

The lower frequency of references and percentage rates of coded interview content among the emergent categories in both rounds of interviews demonstrated the

Table 6. Emergent references and percentages of coding by telephone interviews

	Cat. 1	Cat. 2	Cat. 3	Cat. 4	Cat. 5	Cat. 6	Cat. 7
A	n/a	6/5.91	3/3.54	2/1.48	1/0.28	5/6.86	6/8.61
B	6/9.71	3/3.20	1/1.83	1/0.29	1/2.45	2/2.45	4/8.72
C	5/7.70	1/3.03	2/2.16	2/2.57	1/0.93	7/5.56	1/1.64
D	5/8.38	n/a	2/5.62	2/1.0	1/0.64	2/2.65	1/1.42
E	4/5.39	n/a	1/4.40	1/1.10	1/0.16	2/1.54	6/7.56
F	4/4.22	6/7.34	2/2.16	1/1.24	1/1.45	11/7.93	3/3.08
G	4/6.01	4/5.24	1/1.24	2/3.29	1/0.75	2/3.24	1/2.14
H	1/1.37	4/3.71	2/3.34	2/1.48	1/0.28	6/10.12	1/3.26
I	3/1.96	3/1.40	1/0.11	2/1.27	1/0.47	2/0.21	3/1.72
J	2/2.89	1/1.76	1/2.28	1/2.14	2/2.76	7/9.75	1/1.57
K	2/3.17	2/2.82	3/4.52	1/0.14	1/3.16	6/6.61	7/11.33
	3.27/ 4.62	2.72/ 3.12	1.72/ 2.84	1.55/ 1.45	1.09/ 1.21	4.72/ 5.17	3.09/ 4.64

secondary nature of the emergent categories to the *a priori* categories. These rates are limited in the extent of their meaning other than the reference counts, but the percentages showed how much emphasis was given to the emergent categories by the contributors. While they are not as dominant among the interview contents, the meaning of these categories and the nuances they provided concerning the reflections of the contributors came more from the contextual descriptions of each category.

Relationships among Categories

The third phase of the data analysis was a continued re-examination of the interviews with contributors to children's ministry and the identification of relationships

Table 7. Emergent references and percentages of coding by in person interviews

Int.	Cat. 1	Cat. 2	Cat. 3	Cat. 4	Cat. 5	Cat. 6	Cat. 7
L2	1/2.55	1/0.26	3/8.21	1/.25	1/3.46	n/a	2/5.05
M2	n/a	n/a	8/19.62	2/4.10	2/2.04	1/5.43	n/a
N2	2/4.29	n/a	2/3.04	2/4.56	1/3.11	2/7.15	1/1.17
O2	2/2.92	1/3.19	3/14.59	2/2.32	n/a	1/4.49	n/a
P2	5/8.09	2/3.21	4/6.08	1/0.84	1/2.29	5/12.50	2/3.89
	2/ 3.57	0.8/ 1.33	4.8/ 10.30	1.6/ 2.41	1/ 2.18	2.8/ 5.91	1/ 2.02

among the categories. Relationships were discovered among the first round interviews between *a priori* and emergent categories as well as within the categories themselves.

Upon completion of the second round interviews, those transcripts were also examined for possible relationships. Another benefit of the *NVivo* software was the structure for tracking relationships as they were identified. The software allowed for the structuring of relationships by creating new nodes with the identified categories and then defining the type of relationship between the two categories. Fourteen relationships were identified by the researcher, and these were displayed in Table 8. The relationships were displayed in the table from the greatest frequency in coding to the least and discussed with examples of references provided in the same order. Because of the sometimes subtle nature of relationships, longer references were provided when possible in order to allow for a contextual framework in which the relationship could be seen.

These relationships provided further insight into the meaning of the identified categories and the content of the interviews as well. The relationships were coded by the

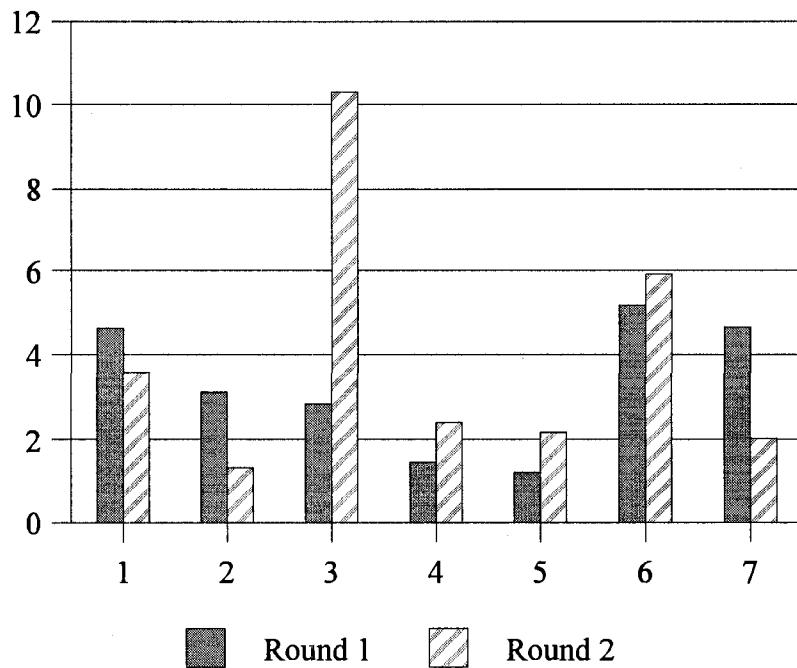


Figure 3. Visual comparison of emergent coding average percentage rates

researcher as the interview data was examined repeatedly. The data was coded at the appropriate relationships, and the references revealed possible explanations and motivators behind the attitudes and assumptions of the contributors.

Relationship 1

Relationship 1 identified the influence of theology of children discussed by the contributors had on their methodology of ministry. This relationship had the greatest frequency in coding with 76 references in the first interviews and 20 references in the second interviews. That these were the largest number of references among both interview rounds was an interesting occurrence as it was a possible indicator that the contributors' theology of children was the dominating determining factor in how they do ministry with children. References of theological issues occurred throughout the

interviews, not just in the theological section of the research instrument and was another possible indicator of the importance of theology of children for children's ministry contributors.

The variety of theological and methodological issues that demonstrated influence in the relationship was best seen in the references themselves. The most basic expression of this relationship was the direct identification of it in Interview F when the contributor said, "Everything we look at in [the contributor's ministry] is first and foremost biblically or Bible centered. We start there, we don't start with any other philosophy or premise. It's always, let's get back to the Word, let's look at the chapter and verse." (Interview F) Theology of children was influential in many different aspects of their ministries, and some of those areas were presented here.

Salvation of Children and Methodology

Leading children to a relationship with Christ was important to the contributors, and their theological understanding of a child's opportunity for a relationship with Christ influenced their methods of ministry. Examples of these references revealed this aspect of the relationship:

I am not going to stop them from being baptized. I am not going to play the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit's job to convict your child when they are ready and with my Sunday School teachers will come from a different angle and will say, 'you know, you are not God, don't push that child to make a decision they are not ready to make'. Paul says, and let somebody else, maybe you are the planter and let somebody else water it and somebody else reap it and I have been there two years now at church and my teachers have started realizing that it is okay for a kid to just ask questions and not make a profession of faith today [sic]. (Interview P2)

Table 8. Relationships Discovered through Emergent Coding

	Influence Category	Relationship	Affected Category	References	
				1 st	2 nd
1	Theology of Children	Influences	Methodology of Ministry	76	20
2	Attitudes of Cultural Relevancy	Influences	Methodology of Ministry	43	17
3	Developmental Appropriateness	Influences	Methodology of Ministry	38	19
4	Apologetic of Cultural Relevancy	Influences	Attitudes of Cultural Relevancy	30	6
5	Religious Traditions	Supercedes	Attitudes of Cultural Relevancy	20	8
6	Media	Connected	Methodology of Ministry	19	6
7	Theology of Children	Connected	Developmental Appropriateness	15	11
8	Parental Responsibility	Associated	Methodology of Ministry	12	3
9	Theology of Children	Balance	Media	8	2
10	Postmodernism in Children's Ministry	Influences	Methodology of Ministry	7	n/a
11	Attitudes of Cultural Relevancy	Move Away From	Classic Children's Methods	6	2
12	Postmodernism in Children's Ministry	Connected	Attitudes of Cultural Relevancy	5	1
13	Attitudes of Cultural Relevancy	Connected	Developmental Appropriateness	3	1
14	Theology of Children	Supercedes	Postmodernism in Children's Ministry	3	5

Now as far as you said my biblical understanding that I was talking about earlier how that's shaped it well, the fact that I know that kids are vital to the church, they're not only the church of the future, but they're leaders in their community and in their groups today [sic]. We gotta get a hold of them and get them following down the right path in order to lead others down the right path. We're very intentional in everything we do. Nothing is done just 'cause. We question everything all the time because we want to make sure whatever we're doing is being effective and is reaching the kids. (Interview E)

The contributor in Interview E expressed intentionality in the development and implementation of methods to reach children because of the theological presupposition to lead and reach children. Similarly the theological presupposition of a child's need for salvation motivated the methodology of the contributor in Interview B to use language a child can understand:

Salvation with kids . . . it's a full acknowledgment. The thing with the language . . . the language I use these days when we are teaching on video is that you have to come to a point in your life where you acknowledge that Christ died for your sins and that He was on this earth to die for your sins and that only through the blood of Christ, Him dying on the cross, and raising on the third day do we have a way to heaven [sic]. Now you have to ask Jesus, God to be the boss of your life . . . that is the language I use. I also use coach of your life. To use language like Lord, kids seem to get that. What is Lord? We don't live in that feudalistic system that they did years ago. Coach, boss, someone that's in charge of your life...that is the kind of language that we use. Obviously someone that is in charge of your life . . . now my theology is probably more conservative, so I believe once you've asked Jesus to be the boss of your life He'll never let anybody take you out of His hands. (Interview B)

The presupposition influenced the contributor in Interview K in the methodology of ministry both in local church context and in the national leadership training led by the contributor:

I think as far as I believe children need to be given an opportunity to respond to the gospel invitation of salvation. I think it needs to be clearly and simply articulated and I think there needs to deliberate time and space given to kids as well as instruction on how they can respond. That's one thing as far as boy we are really clear on that here and that is something that I tell other children's ministries too as far as don't have it be a soft subtle point have it be a climatic point that so that kids

can clearly mark a moment because when they move on out of your ministry there will be times when the legitimacy and the reality of their faith is going to be in question in their own mind and they need to have a point in time where they can look back and say yes I did give my life to Jesus right then or what will happen is they will believe the lies of the evil one who says you really didn't do that, that was pretend or that really didn't happen. (Interview K)

Baptism and Methodology

The issue of baptism of children, for example, also was revealing as to the influence of theology over methodology. The contributors had definitive theological presuppositions of baptism and subsequently how to deal with children and baptism:

So being a pastor of little children, I believe that kids can be baptized. I understand some of the cautions. There is a Q&A [in the contributor's ministry] where I kind of address the thought or detail from churches who do not allow kid to do that until they are older, and I can understand the concern behind that because often people think they are too young they don't remember it or perhaps they feel they did it for the wrong reasons, because their friends were doing it or for other artificial reasons like that [sic]. I don't believe in infant baptism. I believe that it is pretty clear to me that the model of baptism in the Gospels was with people making decisions to publicly declare their allegiance to Jesus Christ, and I not sure an infant is capable of that. I don't know how much you want to get into that. I think kids can be baptized and I think that it is wise to wait until they make their own decision. Some churches have a policy of waiting until they are 12. (Interview A)

Interview O2 revealed an unanticipated conflict between the theological presuppositions of the contributor and what the contributor experienced:

That is something I dealt with a lot personally because I grew up Baptist, and I became [current denomination] when I married. I realized how important that was to me again through my own children. I believe in our church they have the infant baptism. I personally did not see that as baptism. I see it as a dedication of my child and his or her bringing to God. Both of my children were baptized after they became Christians and that was important to me. The infant baptism was not baptism to me. (Interview O2)

The involvement of parents in the decision to baptize a child, ensuring that the child understood the theological meaning of baptism, was described as a methodology for the

contributor in Interview B:

I want kids number one to understand that baptism doesn't get them to heaven, but it doesn't wash away their sin either. In other words, I come across a lot of kids that equate going into the waters as taking a spiritual bath. I would sit down with them and do an interview class with them and just say baptism is like a wedding ring. It is an outward evidence of an inward commitment. (Interview B)

Parental Responsibility and Methodology

The contributors' theological views of the role of parenting was another example of the influence of theology over methodology. One contributor described how the methodology of ministry with children employed in the contributor's ministry needed to be aligned with the presupposition of parental responsibility:

I think that one of the visions that we have here at [the contributor's ministry] is we want to . . . we're going to do this coming year in big ways . . . but we're gonna boldly communicate to the Christians in America that we've missed the boat and that we've lost a generation or two and that if you keep whacking away down to the root of this problem we'll discover that the church has unfortunately been acting as a spiritual surrogate for disconnected parents who are lacking knowledge and instruction and understanding as to biblical parenting 101 [sic]. (Interview F)

Another contributor recognized the methods needed to equip parents to do the work of spiritual nurturing:

While we need to be teaching the truth and we need to be obviously providing an environment where kids are growing in their walk with Christ so much of the nurturing part goes back to the parents. For us as the children's ministry leaders to be the resources, the encouragement to them, to provide them with tools whether it's anything from devotional tools to how you deal with certain issues even something as simple as parenting classes. (Interview G)

In Interview J the contributor described a more recent realization that the biblical role of parenting needed to be visible in methodology:

We hope and pray that when they go home that they don't dump and run [sic]. I used to resent the dump and runners. But then wait this is an opportunity for us to love on them. If they go back into it maybe something will spark and they can at

least ask their parents and actually in the preschool stuff I give them a kind of do today that involves asking their parents something. We give them a little sheet so that they know to take it home and give it to their mom or dad or someone special to you and go through it. So whether they are "Christian" or not we are setting up at least an opportunity at home. But as a church or as a minister we can only do so much as far as the children go. (Interview N2)

Community and Methodology

Another presupposition, such the need for community or personal relationships also influenced the methodologies of the contributors. The presupposition of community influenced one contributor to choose not to do a particular program in the contributor's ministry context:

I'm also going to emphasize the relational aspects of biblical instruction as opposed to the informational aspects of it. I'm not going to be an AWANA person or I'm not going to be a kind of person that looks at, oh they're going to need to know the books of the Bible or oh, they need to know these facts or these figures. I recognize that . . . or memorize verses [sic]. It's a little counter cultural. It's counter church. Memorizing scripture is not the goal. The goal is to put scripture into practice. As you put it into practice you could possibly memorize it. I don't think the goal is to memorize scads of scripture thinking that is the sum total of a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. It can actually substitute for and give kids pride in a very human activity. (Interview H)

Again the methodology was influenced by the recognized need for community as another contributor described the priorities in ministry:

In a weekly basis there needs to be opportunities for children to experience meaningful worship, experience meaningful corporate prayer, and experience the teaching of the Word of God. All of them can take a million forms, but those three things are just . . . and also community [sic]. Children need to be able to come together and to be able to talk to each other and serve each other and see that type of community. Those are just a couple of things that are just essential. (Interview C)

This presupposition of community influenced other contributors to implement ministry methods that created community for children:

Another one is getting kids involved in the ministry themselves. Especially some of

the older kids. Models, the real effective ones that I have seen are building kids ministry teams that have kids involved they're taking some responsibility for the ministry and having the opportunity to sow back into it what they have gotten out of it. (Interview G)

. . . the hallmark of my ministry and how I really try to address that is in the Casey crew that I have. For 15 years I have always had my ministry run by my children's church. I really try to take the models from my own life as I discovered that I could serve God as a child and my motto is "if a kid can do it, then an adult shouldn't do it" and I have kids running all the technical equipment, actually using kids doing registration, doing welcome, doing setup, takedown, clean up, even taking on the ministry task of running out to greet visitors, try to get to know people, even asking them where they are from. We talk about their families, their recreation and occupation which to a kid is "what do you want to do when you grow up" and motivation. When I have gone out of town I have actually had kids to completely run the children's church and I just had to have some adult bodies in there to monitor them. That is probably the most tangible way, that is the age that they can begin to show leadership, ownership and creativity and function as part of a group and then give instead of receive. It has been fantastic. (Interview A)

Relationship 2

Relationship 2 resulted from the recognition of the extent to which attitudes of the contributors towards cultural relevancy played a role in the methodology of ministry they employed. This relationship was quite dominant among both groups of interviews as it was coded at a frequency of 43 references in the first group and 17 references in the second group. The influence of attitudes of cultural relevancy could be seen throughout the interviews. In broader terms, the influence was not seen necessarily in specific programming as much as it was in the thought processes of the contributors as they tried to determine what might be appealing to children in order to reach them and communicate the message of the Bible:

I guess more on a macro level just the . . . trying to be relevant to where the culture of where that church is at. If it's an inner city church trying to really meet the needs of those kids would be totally different to a church in a rural setting. A church that is aware that there are specific needs of that target population that they are reaching

out to and trying to meet those needs. Having programs that meet the social, physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of that group of kids is really important. There is no one ministry that is going to meet the needs of every kid. We need to customize what we are offering to the needs that we are recognizing. (Interview G)

Methodology of ministry was influenced by the need to remain culturally relevant as was seen in interview F:

Well we've come to recognize that we can't keep our heads in the sand any longer and we can't think that all we have to do is go back to the culture of the 1960's and think that is going to be appealing or attractive to our kids. The truth of the matter is the way we are wired as human beings we love entertainment, we love technology. (Interview F)

Cultural relevancy influenced the methodology of ministry for the contributor in Interview P2 as teaching methods were described:

What was fun 20 years ago may not be fun for kids today, and we can't teach the same way today that we taught when we were kids. We live in such a multi high tech world that we have to find ways to do that. One of the challenges that we have run into in doing this is, how do you write a situation, we say we want it to be cutting edge, we want it to be fresh but at the same time if we put a real-life situation in there, we run into this 65-year-old person who gripes and complains and says "that's not where my kids live" [sic]. Yes it is. You just got to look at their world. So we look at life application type things – how would they do in a situation that is a real-life situation for kids and sometimes we have to use terminology that we may not be comfortable with. (Interview P2)

The attitude towards cultural relevancy impacted the methods of the contributor in Interview E as the clear intent was to do ministry by being creative:

I believe we've got to pursue getting their attention and when we have it make the most of it with everything we've got and that's why we put so much time and effort into creatively creating an atmosphere that is conducive for learning, but also puts the kids in a learning atmosphere that is almost overwhelming as far as they feel like they're there. We try to make it very interactive and so that has definitely shaped the way I approach from a media stand point, from a creative arts stand point. We are not stale and we are not boring. Maybe sometimes we are a little too over the top, but we're anything but boring. So that's definitely shaped our approach. (Interview E)

Relationship 3

In the discussion of the *a priori* categories, developmental appropriateness did not produce the anticipated results in the content of the interviews, but what educational assumptions the contributors did describe also revealed a relationship between developmentalism and methodology of ministry. The relationship of developmental appropriateness influencing methodology of ministry among the first round of interviews was coded at a rate 38 references and 17 references among the second round. In some references the influence of developmental appropriateness was very obvious and direct, but in other instances the contributors were almost unintentional in their references.

In interview J the contributor was discussing the theological issue of baptism but the methodology of how and when baptism occurred was influenced by the contributor's educational assumptions concerning a child's cognitive abilities:

We believe in children being baptized. It is a decision that they make on their own. Currently, we have a guideline in place where we recommend 2nd grade and above. Partly because developmentally helping them to remember this special occasion and being able to understand it a little bit more [sic]. We're open as well to someone younger. We have a conversation with the parents and the child to see if we feel like they understand what they are doing. (Interview J)

As can be seen in examples from Interviews J, D, and O2 some contributors were more direct about the influence of developmental appropriateness in the decisions they made about ministry methodology. In these three instances the contributors described the influence of developmentalism in the spiritual nurturing of children, the physical needs of children, and curricula decisions respectively:

In the older elementary years we give the children an opportunity to own their faith more. They have the cognitive abilities to understand more about their faith, how that looks in their own life, maybe comparing that faith to other religions. (Interview J)

We also need to make sure we are ministering based upon the age related needs of the kids in our ministry. That can be very practical as far as even the furnishings that you choose to buy for your ministry, the toys you choose for them to play with, the books you have available for them, the treats and so on. Your teaching style, your method . . . you need to make sure that your method is aligned with those age based needs. (Interview D)

[The curriculum I write] is where I really use child development issues. I have to know what 3 and 4 year olds are capable of. What 5 and 6 year olds are capable of [sic]. (she shows you something here) Most of what I do is preschool. I do also incorporate all ages. That is really how I use childhood development stuff. Knowing children and their capabilities, interests, I really have to know it in order to do that. (Interview O2)

While developmentalism was a factor of influence for many of the contributors one contributor in particular was not certain that developmental theory should have had influence in children's ministry:

. . . that's where Piaget and Erikson are conformists because they made their studies based on observations of children. The big difference in the church is we are not developing kids who are going through a school structured system. We're developing kids who could get closer to Jesus Christ. Looking at the disciples if we want to start with the first model. They were all over the board in terms of . . . and yet they were probably all the same age and stages in their psycho-social development, but they were all over the place because it's relative. It's not their age, stature, or size only...it's relative to your closeness to Jesus Christ. Some days you're closer than others. Churches shouldn't be in the business of sin avoidance, they should be in the business of teaching kids to rely more and more on Jesus Christ. (Interview H)

Relationship 4

The relationship of influence between an apologetic of cultural relevancy and attitudes of cultural relevancy was coded at a rate of 30 references in the first group and 6 in the second. The distinction between the categories themselves was important as the contributors explained their biblical and philosophical reasons for their views on cultural relevancy. As the researcher reviewed their positions, it seemed that this apologetic

influenced the attitudes of cultural relevancy among the contributors. In interview E the contributor described a need for godly wisdom in the effort to communicate the Bible to children in a way that was relevant to them:

Rather than get them able to quote a Sunday School answer, we get them to try to think through, all right here's what the Bible says, how does that apply to X situation [sic]. We get them in small groups talking about that, dissecting what does it mean to live this Scripture out everyday. I'm definitely understanding that cultural influences, they have a much greater platform and a much stronger voice with kids than we do and that's why we gotta depend upon the wisdom of God, the power of the Holy Spirit to be able to double our efforts every chance we get. (Interview E)

Another contributor shared similar views in that striving to be separate from the world must be balanced with understanding cultural contexts and communicating truth within it, and the two references from interview B offered here further demonstrated the attempt to explain the reason for cultural relevance and the subsequent attitude towards it:

Looking at culture, I think what happens sometimes is you look at culture and you think, "you are in the world, but not of it". It's a fine line because you don't want to make the mistake of okay that's the world, so we are not going to do that. I think that is throwing the baby out with the bath water. I think you really have to be aware of what is going on in the world and as some folks have built . . . whether it be Apple or Hewlett Packard or Dell . . . there's ways of communicating. I mean why not use those things. (Interview B)

. . . I think that you can go one of two ways. You can go so far into it where you are not communicating the message. You can go to whatever extreme you want to communicate the message as long as it results in knowing Christ or growing in Christ or serving Christ or sharing Christ but results in a biblical application . . . I say why not at least give it a try. You can always come back and say, that didn't work or that probably wasn't the best way to do it. It's like in Philippians 1, when Paul said some preach Christ out of pretense and truth and he says but who cares. As long as Christ is being preached. Paul thought that they were doing it to mock him and they were, but his response was, I don't care if they are doing it to mock me. Christ is being preached. Paul had something to say about methodology there. As long as Christ was being preached and I think if our message changes, then we are in trouble. (Interview B)

Interviews F, A, and N2 also contributed to the data for this relationship as they recounted

the appropriate place for cultural relevancy and the potential harm for not understanding the need for culturally relevant communication:

I think fundamentally that's where our churches keep messing up. They can't seem to separate the big stuff from the little stuff. Follow this logic for a minute. It's not that any of us wake up some morning and say I've been esteeming Jesus way up on the cross and I've been keeping Him above everything I'm going to pull Him down today and put Him on equal footing with everything else. None of us would do that. The problem, though, is we all take the issues and the pet peeves, and the conflicts and all that other stuff that we deal with everyday and we keep raising the value of these things up until we ultimately cloud and obscure the cross. (Interview F)

You know Paul said that we are to be all things to all men so that they might be reached and children's ministry to me is cross-cultural ministry so my passion is to equip adults to not defeat kid knowledge but to relate to them within the context of the culture. I mean Jesus did that. He used current stories, he used current issues, the object lessons that Jesus taught were from the agricultural culture and fishing culture of that day, but it is absolutely critical that we minister to kids within the context of their culture. (Interview A)

In Kidmo, we take it quite far. We try to acknowledge the things that are happening. We use media. Culture becomes a resource. Jesus used his culture. He used things taken from culture. He either explained it or redefined it or he illustrated spiritual concepts from his present experience to convey spiritual truth.

Relationship 5

In the research instrument contributors were asked if they utilized any religious traditions even despite the intention to be culturally relevant. Their responses primarily centered around spiritual disciplines, but the contributors certainly identified issues that superceded the need to be culturally relevant. General views towards religious traditions were as much an aspect of the discussions as were specific actions or programs, and their references resulted in a coding rate of 20 references for the first round and 8 references for the second round.

The recognition of the place of religious tradition seemed to supercede the need

for cultural relevancy at least in some scenarios. Interview L2 explained a view of religious tradition where the contributor's understanding of some religious tradition can supercede relevancy:

We have the sacraments. To teach those and to lead the kids in those are incredibly . . . you have to. Those are the vehicles that Jesus said this is my body, this is my blood. Why wouldn't you take advantage of that tradition? Baptism . . . yes [sic]. Traditions of worship, traditions of listening to someone herald the word and sitting under that, traditions of missions, traditions of blessing the poor and the sick, traditions of blessing yourself...these are all things the church has been about for a long time. (Interview L2)

Another contributor equated Sunday School as a religious tradition which needs to be maintained so long at it is utilized appropriately in the life of the church:

I'm sure you are aware, what was it about 160 years ago the pastors of London, England got together and said man look at these little street urchins. They're coming from unchurched families, they need to know the Lord, and out of I think a desire to be outreach focused these pastors came up with none other than Sunday School [sic]. And by the way Sunday School, I believe with all my heart is a powerful tool if it's used properly. The problem isn't the Sunday School. The problem is that 50 or 60 years ago we screwed all our heads on backwards and the typical pastor and the typical parent began to think well, Sunday School is really where spiritual development takes place [sic]. Sunday School then, unfortunately, was compartmentalized and people began to think that's where the action is that's where it takes place we can fully trust in Sunday School as a stand alone and they will deliver the goods. (Interview F)

References from Interviews A and H also reflected an understanding from the contributors that the church itself will not ever truly be culturally acceptable and in turn should not compromise basic biblical doctrines that change who the church is:

I think that we have to make sure that we don't care what the world thinks when it comes to worship, when it comes to studying the Bible, memorizing the Bible, I hope getting baptized never becomes uncool [sic]. I think we need to make sure that what we do because we believe God calls us to do it, we do it even if we fear not looking relevant. I think our relevancy comes on the outreach end and in getting people to get over the threshold but once they are over the threshold, then I think that becomes less important. (Interview A)

I am saying that I think even our culture, broader culture, expects a church to look like a church, act like a church, hold functions that are church like. Not necessarily formal, but routine, kind of traditions. I think we should maintain our traditions while at the same time maintaining an acceptable acceptance of people who may be unfamiliar with those kinds of traditions. (Interview H)

Relationship 6

Media seemed to be connected to methodology of ministry for some of the contributors, and that relationship was coded at a rate of 19 references in the first round of interviews and 6 references in the second round. The relationship was identified because media was referenced by the contributors in terms of its use in their ministries as means of identifying, communicating, and teaching children. The methodology of using media was driven by the desire to communicate with children and their parents in ways that were familiar and effective:

Also we do a lot of video and graphics because the kids are so visual. I don't necessarily think it's a good thing that they spend so much time watching video games and watching TV, but they do and they have become a very visually based generation. So we are very visual in our illustrations, visual in media. We incorporate just about every style of visual that you can imagine. (Interview E)

I don't think you have to have a TV or a projector in a church to be relevant. The [contributor's ministry], we want it to be more of a resource. It came out of [a friend's church]. He couldn't staff 11 services and that is how that started. You could use clips from movies if you are trying to illustrate something. It doesn't have to be big and fancy, but if you are aware of what they see and what they listen to and you speak to them in accordance with that. Listen to this or look at this and then let's see what the Bible says [sic]. What do you do? Media can be a great tool but it is not the tool. Jesus used object lessons. Media is an object lesson. You can do an object lesson with this. We just happened to take a picture of this. Any ministry can do that. It's just a principle. (Interview N2)

Other contributors discussed the potentiality of media and technology as evangelistic tools put in the hands of children but the motivation for using media seems to consistently be to present the message of Christ in a way that is relevant to children:

What I want to do is say how do we use the cultural relevance of technology and get lessons in the kid's hands when they leave the church so if they are in 4th grade they leave and if they had an I-Pod that played video they can download as they walk out. They can get that day's lesson. (Interview B)

I just look at it as far as you know more media driven stuff yeah we're going to do that in [the contributor's ministry] we're ever increasing in terms of media, but guess what our scope and sequence hasn't changed and the lessons that we're trying to accomplish with our lessons and the pathway we are on that hasn't changed and we're still . . . we're using any tool that we have available to us to get kids to the point that they will authentically say yes to Jesus and give their heart to him [sic]. In terms of media I say use media as much or as little as you want I would say be very smart about it where . . . we're increasing our use of media and at the same time we're increasing our use of live drama and new live conventions or elements in our programs with kids so they get more media. (Interview K)

Relationship 7

The researcher observed another connection among the interviews, the relationship between the contributors' theology of children and developmental appropriateness. Among both groups of interviews there was an observable connection between the theological presuppositions of the contributors and the limits to the practical implementation of those presuppositions based on a child's developmental state. In other words, the contributors had definitive theological views, but those views seemed to be tempered by the contributors understanding of developmental appropriateness. In an excerpt from Interview B the contributor expressed the belief that children need Christ as Savior but cannot make a decision until they are developmentally ready:

Now I believe that until they reach the age of accountability they're not responsible for that information until they can cognitively or in their mind understand and articulate not only what is sin, but the need for a Savior and how they can take the steps to ask Christ to be the boss of their lives. (Interview B)

Interview G and O2 were other reflections of the connection between theology and development as the contributors explained a hesitation about current developmental

theory in exchange for a more traditional teaching method or in lieu of relationships:

I think theology would be a place for that, an instructor expert to share experiences and ways of application. I think modern child development theory in some ways kind of scrapes of little of that by saying that's not quite as important that the most important thing is that they are constructing their own understanding [sic]. So I think you need balance. I think balance is important. (Interview G)

I think it certainly helps because it allows for differences in children. It allows us to understand what they are capable of. In the same sense it can hinder because you can lock children in a box. They are only three so they can only do this. It doesn't allow for God things to happen. If you get blocked in like that. It can help you certainly understand the group that you are working with or hinder. (Interview O2)

The connection between developmental appropriateness and theology also could be seen in the desire to make church biblically centered and appropriate for children's ministry, and the contributors transferred the concept of developmental theory and applied it to stages of spiritual growth:

If you look at Scripture and the different metaphors that Paul used and Jesus used as far as spiritual actions like a plant or a seed that perhaps developmentally helps us understand spirituality [sic]. Jesus called it a spiritual life. By bringing in wisdom from the educational field they remind us that spirituality isn't a crux of information or more of a rational comprehension of things, but it's actually a whole person and process. (Interview C)

Relationship 8

The issue of parenting was referenced with such passion by some of the contributors that the researcher recognized another type of relationship involving parental responsibility and methodology of ministry, distinct from the broader relationship between theology as an influence over methodology. Specifically this relationship was reflective of the practical steps taken by contributors or recommended by contributors concerning ministry methodology and parental responsibility:

I think Scripture teaches that parents are responsible for it and I don't blame parents and I don't blame the church. I just think there is a misrepresentation in the roles in that the church is in the way they approach things has said hey we're going to take care of your kids spiritually and parents have bought in to that. I don't think it's a fault, I just think churches instead of providing more programs for kids should provide more tools for parents that would help them. (Interview B)

In other words, there is an absolutely monstrous disconnect between the children and their parents spiritually at home. Rarely are things said or done at home to shape them in Jesus Christ. It's like, you know what, you stick 'em in church for an hour or two each week and you get plenty right there. So anyway, I blew on and on on that one [sic]. I just wanted to give you some perspective on the fact that I believe our contribution today for children's ministry, [researcher], is that we're going to put our finger on the problem and say the church can't be the spiritual surrogate any longer. The parents can't try to raise their kids without the church. (Interview F)

So my role as pastor is to equip the parents by giving them activities to do throughout the week, to encourage them that they should be the spiritual champion in their life, but also not shaming them when they can't be or won't be, maybe even having them come into church to have them be a Sunday School leader or small group leader in order to spend more time in spiritual talk with their kids so they get used to it. (Interview H)

Relationship 9

The relationship between theology of children and media as identified by the researcher was characterized as a relationship of balance. Eight references were coded at this relationship, and those references revealed a desire for balance with the use of media which was tempered by their theological presuppositions. The second round interviews included 2 identified references to this relationship. Interview G was very specific in the need for balance between theology of children and media in order that the church not spend too much preparing media that the content of the message was lost:

The truths never change and I think we can try to be glitzy and do all this really neat stuff especially because kids are exposed to so much in the media their expectations are a lot higher now than they've ever been. It's just as far as quality of an illustration, a video, or whatever, and it's easy for us to get caught up in the trying to produce this perfect video clip or illustration where we spend more effort on that

than we are ministering to the needs of our kids or communicating the message. We can lose sight of the things we need to keep a priority. (Interview G)

There is a caution to not be obsessive because there is a balance of options for the church. We are to be the master not be mastered. the church's role is to recognize children who stray. We need to help them separate real from unreal. Creativity is good and there will probably be more creativity in heaven. Can't deny God without denying creativity. "Edutainment" principle as expressed in Veggie tales. Acknowledge the response by some churches to do more family worship with children involved in the main services. This is occurring more in smaller congregations with more liturgical traditions. (Interview H)

Relationship 10

Postmodernism as an issue in the research instrument was addressed in the last section of the interviews, and 3 questions were asked of the contributors, leading them to reflect on their understanding and approach to the concept. There were 7 references in the first round of interviews coded at the relationship between postmodernism and it's influence in the methodology of ministry of the contributors. Interestingly, there was no content among the second round of interviews coded at this relationship, but the contributors in the second round of interviews were less certain about the concept of postmodernism than those contributors from the first round, leaving little to no influence on their methodology of ministry. The contributors responded to this category in the research instrument mostly with timidity, but what was shared contained relationships which demonstrated the influence of postmodernism on the contributors ministry methodology.

Contributors indicated influences on methodology that included issues of relevancy, communication, the nature of truth, and more. The contributor in Interview A noted the relational nature of postmodernism and the subsequent potential

methodological change postmodernism requires for evangelism:

The thing that excites me the most about postmodernism is the emphasis on relationship, that we love spiritual laws, we love logical approaches and arguments and politics and those things don't work with postmodern and in some ways that kind of puts us feeling like a fish out of water because we are so used to being able to argue people into our faith, but I think the advantages then – hey I'm not sure how successful I really was. (Interview A)

Interview K also expressed the need for methodological change as a result of postmodernism in children's ministry, and the contributor expressed this need with a sense of optimism:

Yeah, I would say that what children's ministry needs to do is look at what cultural shift and be opportunistic with the cultural shift. Say okay we've had a cultural shift towards more experiential learning now that in education settings [sic]. Now that's pretty clear. And so I say look at that as far as what opportunity does that give you to use those shifts again to point kids hearts towards God. so it's a matter of . . . I always tell people, don't be afraid of cultural shifts just look for the opportunity. Don't do anything goofy in terms of forcing it, but at the same time look for opportunities whenever you see cultural shifts. (Interview K)

A specific influence of postmodernism in ministry methodology was identified by two contributors in Interview E and J. The need for community and the related opportunity for service was identified in Interview E as trends in postmodernism, and a subsequent methodology change to meet those needs was also suggested. Interview J also addressed the issues of community and the desire for service opportunities, although the same issue surfaced when the contributor was asked about religious traditions. The similarity is apparent regardless:

I think it's important to them to be involved in their communities as well. I'm certainly seeing that with kids. They want to, they're very cause oriented. They want to give to their community and so we need to create some meaningful service opportunities for children and for the whole family to be able to do together. Just a sense of community [sic]. To be able to get them to see beyond themselves to see that the church is all about seeing beyond yourself. (Interview E)

Another huge thing is children serving . . . providing opportunities for kids to serve in their local church and in their community. I'm really excited to see some of the other churches doing that . . . providing opportunities for them to go on mission teams, serving on different work groups at their church or community projects . . . any other projects that the kids are involved in. I think that is relevant to the culture and to the generation even to the parents that are very interested in serving and giving back. (Interview J)

Relationship 11

Attitudes of cultural relevancy as an *a priori* category was a prolific theme in the research findings and resulted in a number of potential relationships. Another of these relationships identified by the researcher involved the move away from classic children's methodology due to the attitudes of contributors towards cultural relevancy. This move away from classic methods as a relationship was coded with a frequency of 6 references in the first round interviews and 2 in the second.

The researcher was able to identify this relationship because of the contributors' limited but definitive views of classic children's ministry methodology. The expressed need to be relevant seemed to be the factor for contributors to move away from some of the more traditional children's ministry programming. Some of the contributors were adamant about moving away from classic programming:

We're still doing children's choir and missions and we're still calling Sunday School, Sunday School. The word doesn't even make since. It's worse than Saturday School. We're still in the 60's, maybe the 70's. We're not speaking a child's language. A child is being entertained and wired all week electronically and technologically and they walk in to this wonderful flannel graph presentation and they kind of melt down. (Interview I)

We are going to do a few things well. We're not going to try to do everything for everybody. We're going to do what we feel are the top priorities. The churches that are growing fastest are the ones that have fewer programs. The churches that are the happiest are the ones that say we are going to do this once a week at church. (Interview I)

Classic modes of children's media were also evaluated by the contributors in an effort to be culturally relevant:

We got to the point last summer that the kids were leaving with these huge plastic bags of full of crud, candy, prizes and basically what we were doing was bribing the kids to come to church and I said I'm not doing it. It is a new summer this year and I am not going to bribe kids to come to church. That is one of those things where I finally said enough is enough. But I think that going along with the spiritual specific steps is you've got to educate people to why. Why are you doing what you are doing? (Interview P2)

You've got to have the relationship, but you also have to stay current with technology. If you are using flannel graph with 6th grade in the United States you have a problem. Flannel graph, when that came out, was touted as (unintelligible). Now we look at it as a little bit antiquated. Now people are looking at video and going well . . . it's what flannel was 40 years ago. As you start opening up I-Pods and other technical ways to deliver information, then all those are going to come under scrutiny as well. I think we have to keep up with the times or we are going to be irrelevant. (Interview B)

Interview F also indicated a move away from classic children's methodology but not from the program itself, just the method in which it was used:

A good institution that was started many years ago that still exists in most every church that I know of in America, it's still persists as far as allowing this philosophy to run rampant that you know what just get your kids to Sunday School and God's gonna pat you on the back, dad or pat you on the back, mom and say good job, you've done what I expected you to do [sic]. We're screaming out there saying 'No you can't think that way anymore.' You leave it up to this little tiny compartment called Sunday School with disconnected parents and disconnected church by and large you are gonna have a kid who is not a spiritual champion that knows, loves, and serves Jesus. (Interview F)

Relationship 12

Postmodernism as an *a priori* node was restructured under the cultural relevancy node because of the more limited responses provided by the contributors. With that shift, the researcher identified a relationship between postmodernism and the contributors' attitudes of cultural relevancy, but the relationship was only coded at a

frequency of 5 references in the first round and 1 reference in the second. These concepts seemed to be relationally connected as the contributors discussed postmodernism. The contributors indicated that the need for cultural relevancy is due to the trend towards postmodernism and vice versa:

The church is moving to where just like it's not going to be to the political system . . . people are turned off with denominations just like they are politics. It's got to be real. It's got to be relevant . . . But it's so simple. It's got to be real where you can understand it. It's got to be relevant where it applies to my life. They don't care what you believe almost . . . because they are so hungry. (Interview I)

I think it's just it's the current label of an every changing culture and I think what's going to happen is in the coming couple years you're going to find something past postmodernism that will come along. So on postmodernism . . . whenever we have a postmodern discussion I always say let's not use postmodern tell me exactly what cultural shift we're talking about here. It is a shift towards more technology. Is it a shift towards more experiential based learning. What it is is a shift towards that you're seeing [sic]. (Interview K)

Postmodernism has some influence but not as much in children's ministry. [The contributor's ministry] invited 50 Children's Ministers from the largest churches to have a round table discussion about trends in Children's Ministry. Some concern was expressed over cultural trends. Postmodernism is a way of looking at the truth. Truth has been maligned and is more ambiguous. (Interview H)

Minor Relationships

Two additional relationships were identified by the researcher, but each of these had 3 references of coding among the first round. In the second round of interviews a slight increase was seen in one of these categories. This was a very small amount of coding, but a relationship seemed to exist even with the minimal references and similarity to larger categorical relationships.

Relationship 13

The relationship of attitudes of cultural relevancy being connected to

developmental appropriateness was identified and coded as the researcher recognized a nuance to the contributor's views of these issues. The connections are seen in the excerpts provided as they inadvertently acknowledged that being culturally relevant can mean being developmentally appropriate:

Every age and every stage has a different expectation on it. At the same time we keep our hands loose on children so that a 6th grader who is in church and a 6th grader who comes for the very first time don't feel at odds with one another. I think it is one of the great tragedies of our ministries is we develop systems that create environments where a visitor feels odd. So we have to have churches that are geared towards seekers or whole churches that are geared for deeper discipleship.
(Interview H)

It's understanding how children learn. It's understanding how technology actually changes the attention spans. It's understanding the composition of families.
(Interview C)

Relationship 14

With the discussions concerning postmodernism as intended by the research instrument, the contributors expressed concern that whatever the implications of postmodernism, theology must supercede it. It is this relationship where coding increased to 5 references over the 3 identified in the first round. When specifically asked what implications were for children's ministry in a postmodern culture contributors describe their own efforts keep doctrinal integrity despite the postmodern search for constructivist meaning:

I did a whole theology course on post modernism so don't even get me started. Typically the post modern culture is one that is without absolutes. Without a sense of this is truth and there is not changing. Oh, you're a follower of Jesus? Oh, good that's great for you. I think that we all rode in to town on the back of a turtle and that is my reality. In a post modern world I am a Bible thumper. I am a woman who is firmly convinced that there is a God and he did give us absolutes and Jesus is the one and only way to heaven. I can't be dissuaded from that. we are convinced we are followers of the Lord Jesus. We feel compelled by the great commission to go and make disciples of all men and we better go and start young because of what

Barna says. If these kids don't hear the gospel and respond to the gospel by the time they are 8 years old . . . if we don't share it the opportunity that they will come to God later in life is drastically reduced. I have this raging bonfire about it. Words from God: I have asked him if I am done or am I finished. (Interview M2)

Children need to hear that there is a heaven there is a hell, there is judgment. That would be an issue that I would talk about. My fear about labeling people as emerging or emergent is that these labels are so soft and fuzzy that you can paint on people with a soft brush. There are people who identify themselves as emergent that I totally agree with doctrinally. (Interview C)

The other point . . . would be kids need doctrine and as a children's minister or pastor, I need to make sure that I am using curriculum that grounds kids in the truth, that teaches them biblical doctrine and I see another good thing to do if it is not a part of your regular curriculum is to make it part of your regular curriculum is to just teach world view on a regular basis. There is truth and He is a God and He is a judge and we are going to stand before Him one day and just really drive that in during those formative years. (Interview D)

Relationship to the Research Questions

The information from the interviews was gathered ultimately to answer the research questions of this descriptive study. Each question was listed, and the data derived from the three phases of the analysis were summarized and shown in their relationship to each question.

Research Question 1

What are the dominant attitudes towards the role of cultural relevancy of recognized contributors to children's ministry?

The research findings revealed attitudes towards cultural relevancy that could be described as an attitude of passion for the continued utilization of culture as a reference point for ministry, concern for communicating the gospel in ways that are understandable by children, and balance to protect theological integrity. These dominant

themes were revealed through the three stages of analysis which included an examination of *a priori* categories, then emergent categories, and lastly, relationships.

Attitudes in an *A Priori* Category

The first review of the interview content based on *a priori* categories revealed very positive, even passionate attitudes towards cultural relevancy. The high rate of coding among both groups seemed to reflect a great deal of emphasis among the contributors concerning the issue, but the depth of meaning could only come from examining the actual explanations of the contributors.

When asked the research instrument question “To what extent do you or should churches design children’s ministry to be culturally relevant?” the contributors responded most directly, clearly demonstrating their attitudes toward cultural relevancy. While all of the contributors recognized the role of cultural relevancy, some of the interviews contained particularly positive responses:

I feel like it’s extremely important, and I will give you an example. Our new kids building . . . we had many questions and designers. We had some local designers and we talked about what the kids in our community are used to and what types of places they are going to and what to them is fun and interesting, cool and hip. (Interview J)

I’ll say not to what extent but to what percent. I’ll say 100%. 100% relevant. It’s like the soil. We want to till the soil before we plant seeds. We want to develop a child friendly environments so we can, whatever we say. If we say the sky is purple and it’s really green, you know whatever we say is going to be believable if we have developed a relationship. It’s like you and me. We have a friendship. (Interview I)

Yeah, I would say that what children’s ministry needs to do is look at what cultural shift and be opportunistic with the cultural shift. Say okay we’ve had a cultural shift towards more experiential learning now that in education settings. Now that’s pretty clear. And so I say look at that as far as what opportunity does that give you to use those shifts again to point kids hearts towards God. (Interview K)

You have got to do things that take the Bible to the people. With children I feel like you've got to make it relevant and attractive. There are so many things that compete for their attention and the important thing is that the message stays the same but how we present it is what can change. If DVD's or computer games are the culture that they are in, it's okay to use those things as long as our focus and our message is the same. Our method of presenting it is different. (O2)

I think you need to go all out without contradicting any principles or truths in God's Word. I think you need to go all out . . . I think you need to embrace our culture and what is culturally relevant. What is Nickelodeon doing? What is the Disney Channel doing? What is Sports Illustrated for kids saying? Looking at those culturally current venues that seem to be connected with kids, I'm gonna look at those venues or medium, how can I embrace as much as I can without contradicting any principle or truth in God's Word. (Interview D)

These references reflect the attitudes toward cultural relevancy among the contributors, but the related emergent categories also offered valuable insight.

Attitudes in Emergent Categories

As the interview content was examined, categories emerged that revealed further evidence of the attitudes of the contributors towards cultural relevancy. In the second phase of analysis the categories that emerged related to cultural relevancy which also included media and an apologetic of cultural relevancy. Two *a priori* categories, postmodernism in children's ministry and religious traditions, were moved to be reflected as child nodes of attitudes of cultural relevancy due to their relatedness and lack of dominance as *a priori* categories. These categories each demonstrated the positive perspective of the contributors towards cultural relevancy, but they also revealed some of the reservations the contributors had to protect theological integrity.

Attitudes in Relationships

The emergence of relationships among the interview content revealed a greater

meaning for the categories which involved attitudes of cultural relevancy or one of the child nodes. Of the fourteen relationships identified by the researcher, 9 of them involved cultural relevancy. This number of relationships was an indicator of the general interconnectedness of the concept of cultural relevancy within the attitudes of the contributors to children's ministry. Table 9 was provided to demonstrate the relationships involving cultural relevancy issues and the frequency of coding among both rounds of interviews.

Table 9. Relationships Involving Categories Concerning Cultural Relevancy

Influence Category	Relationship	Affected Category	References	
			1st	2nd
Attitudes of Cultural Relevancy	influences	Methodology of Ministry	43	17
Apologetic of Cultural Relevancy	influences	Attitudes of Cultural Relevancy	30	6
Religious Traditions	supercedes	Attitudes of Cultural Relevancy	20	8
Media	connected	Methodology of Ministry	19	6
Theology of Children	balanced	Media	8	2
Postmodernism in Children's Ministry	influences	Methodology of Ministry	7	n/a
Attitudes of Cultural Relevancy	move away from	Classic Children's Methods	6	2
Postmodernism	connected	Attitudes of Cultural Relevancy	5	1
Attitudes of Cultural Relevancy	connected	Developmental Appropriateness	3	1

Research Question 2

What are the dominant theological and philosophical presuppositions concerning children and children's ministry of those that have made recognized contributions to children's ministry?

The theological and philosophical presuppositions of the contributors permeated the entirety of the interviews. Theology of children was the relevant *a priori* category and was coded at a rate of 124 references among the first interviews and 33 among the second. This was the second largest amount of coding, and it demonstrated the amount of discussion given to theological issues during the interviews. The categories were identified through the three stages of analysis of the interview content.

Presuppositions in the *A Priori* Category

The contributors to children's ministry were guided to discuss theological presuppositions and specifically in the theological section of the research instrument, but their views emerged throughout the interviews. In the initial analysis it was evident that the contributors shared similar responses. They were evangelical in their recognition that children need a salvific experience, and they were baptistic in their understanding that children need to be immersed after conversion. This consistency was apparent throughout each interview in both groups. The contributors also emphasized the need for their ministries to be biblically based, and that the church, while it should be culturally relevant, must be separate from the world itself.

Presuppositions in the Emergent Categories

Emergent categories were recognized by the researcher concerning the

theological presuppositions of the contributors as the second stage of the analysis was completed. The emergent category, apologetic of cultural relevancy, is also listed in the cultural relevancy findings, and the researcher recognized its connection to the theological presuppositions of the contributors. As previously acknowledged, the researcher initially named this emergent code as a theology of cultural relevancy. The node was identified as contributors offered explanations from both a biblical perspective and a pragmatic approach to explain their efforts to be culturally relevant in ministry:

Cultural relevancy can mean bringing the Bible to life in a way that kids can understand based upon how they observe life or other cultural influences they have. It may help them understand what the Bible really means to them. (Interview J)

I know that according to the Scripture, God gifts the church with teachers and there is nothing that can replace a man or woman of God standing up in front of a classroom and opening up God's Word and presenting it in a way that kids can understand and get their hands around. (Interview D)

Either we respond to that culture in a way that is recognizing it to be evil and fearful and we need to hide kids from it, or we do the opposite and that is feel that it has no effect on kids and therefore it has an insidious because we don't acknowledge that it can be harmful so the response that I prefer is sort of a balance . . . a very clear balance. If you look at a child and their culture and help them respond both biblically and theologically, (theologically...that probably wouldn't do with kids. I wouldn't use that word first of all) but what they need to do they need to interpret it into not what would Jesus do, but as Christ is growing in you, how does this feel? What would Jesus text message to His friend? What would, you know, those kinds of things. I feel culture can be benign or malignant depending on how we observe it and interpret it. I'm a fan of culture and I'm a fan of knowing the times. I'm not a fan of circling the wagons and fearing culture. (Interview H)

Parental Responsibility was the other emergent category structured under theology of children. The emphasis given to this category was not anticipated by the researcher, but clearly, the parental responsibility for the spiritual nurturing of children was a significant theological presupposition for the contributors. In Interviews F and G two similar views were expressed by the contributors concerning their understanding of

the role parents should play:

You see your responsibility. He specifically said that the children will ask and you can tell them what God can do. The church is a resource for the family. I think today's families are so busy, running from one thing to another. The church is a resource. I hate to think of it as just another thing to do. The church can provide a foundation for the family, a resource to show families how to incorporate Bible foundations into their everyday life. I would like to think that with the community we see ourselves as a team. It is our job to raise and nurture these kids together. I feel like we should help one another to accomplish that. (Interview O2)

I think there's a tendency sometimes to expect the children's pastor or the Sunday School teacher to have all the answers and for all of this spiritual development to happen in an hour and a half on a Sunday morning. While we need to be teaching the truth and we need to be obviously providing an environment where kids are growing in their walk with Christ so much of the nurturing part goes back to the parents. (Interview G)

Presuppositions in Relationship Categories

Relationships concerning theological and philosophical presuppositions emerged among the content of the interviews, and those relationships provided additional insight into the contributors' theological presuppositions. Six relationships were identified that involved the theological categories which included theology of children, apologetic of cultural relevancy, and parental responsibility. Table 10 displayed the 6 theologically related relationships and their frequencies of coding among both interview groups.

The high rates of coding at the relationship between theology of children as an influence over methodology of ministry was an indicator that theological issues of children was very important to the contributors. As described by the contributors, those views were basic evangelical approaches to the sin nature of children, the need for

salvation, baptism after conversion, and the spiritual nurturing of children by parents first and then the local church.

Research Question 3

What are the common themes among the attitudes expressed by the contributing leaders towards cultural relevancy as a determining factor in children's ministry methodology?

Common themes were interwoven through the interview content reflecting both philosophical and practical methodological approaches as described by the contributors. Evidence of this is the coding for the relationship that identified attitudes of

Table 10. Theological Relationship Categories

Influence Category	Relationship	Affected Category	References	
			1 st	2 nd
Theology of Children	influences	Methodology of Ministry	76	20
Apologetic of Cultural Relevancy	influences	Attitudes of Cultural Relevancy	30	6
Theology of Children	connected	Developmental Appropriateness	15	11
Parental Responsibility	associated	Methodology of Ministry	12	3
Theology of Children	balance	Media	8	2
Theology of Children	supercedes	Postmodernism in Children's Ministry	3	5

cultural relevancy as an influence over children's ministry methodology at a rate of 43 occurrences in the first round and 17 in the second. Additionally, total coding for other

related relationships involving attitudes of cultural relevancy reached 98 references in the first round and 26 in the second round of interviews.

Attitudes of Cultural Relevancy and Methodology

The relationships coded between the *a priori* and emergent categories were the primary source to recognize the common themes among the contributors concerning attitudes of cultural relevancy and how those attitudes impact their ministry methodology. Common themes discovered included the desire to communicate the Bible in meaningful and effective ways, the need to stay culturally relevant in order to be appealing to children, and the desire to utilize technology and media as evangelistic and discipleship oriented tools.

An interesting example of the desire and intentionality of children's ministry contributors to be culturally relevant through their methodology was noted by the researcher because of the very similar explanations provided by some of the contributors. The emphasis of being culturally relevant through facilities provided insight into the methodology of the contributors from both round of interviews:

I feel like it's extremely important and I will give you an example. Our new kids building . . . we had many questions and designers. We had some local designers and we talked about what the kids in our community are used to and what types of places they are going to and what to them is fun and interesting, cool and hip. That was really important for us because our kids in our area they go on a lot of vacations. Going to Disneyland for our kids is not a big deal. They have annual passes. They go there regularly. So we had to think . . . what would be timeless in different ways, but also be interesting and exciting . . . even in how we plan the building. We realize that is an important part of our culture. Kids want to be in place and families want (unintelligible) our community in which we live. There needed to be a level of that feel and able to attract kids in our community. We kind of laugh and say we can't do that, it's a little too hokey for our kids. They have a very sophisticated sense of their environment. (Interview J)

Bible study I think is one that has to be more than fluff. The new term “edutainment” in that you’ve got to entertain me to educate me. I struggle with that because I have been to so many different churches around the country who are redesigning their children’s ministry to look like the Disney world with the animated animals and all that kind of stuff, and my thinking is if I lived in Orlando and I went to Disney World every week, how long before that all of a sudden doesn’t appeal to me anymore. Then what’s next? I think we have got to balance the education with the fun. It has got to be fun, it has got to be appealing but it has got to be biblically based and biblically sound. (Interview P2)

Environment is a huge thing right now so a lot of churches are spending millions on creating these learning environments for children that are inviting and I am all for that. If I a member of a church that has those kind of resources and make your church friendly and fun and inviting for kids, then I am all for that but the danger side is that often they have all the packaging but if you ask about how are kids being discipled and how are parents being equipped, (unintelligible) teaching and let that be a motivation for “what are we supposed to be doing.” (Interview A)

Churches that are the most effective decide about their facility as well. You may already know this, I don’t know, this is not an advertisement . . . I have another business called, “[name of business]”. We are creators of child friendly environments and basically what I do is I come in and help churches understand these philosophies and then I get down to practical and show examples of some churches all over the country...here is what your church should or could look like and let’s look at our resources. If you need to do this locally, here’s how you would approach that. If you want to spend \$15 million on it, I’ve got a few groups around the country that can do this. A church has to deal with their facilities instead of giving children leftovers or crumbs, let’s design a Bibleland Theme Park where when a family walks up it’s like a McDonald’s factor. Oh, my goodness, kids love it here and think, this place loves kids. Effective churches put the happy and the play in their ministry. There is a place to be happy and experience childhood. (Interview I)

Another theme common to the contributors was the need to stay relevant, remaining aware of what current trends are, evaluating which ones are useful to incorporate in ministry with children, and how to use culture to design their methodology. Many contributors addressed this theme but additional examples were found in three similar descriptions from two contributors as they discussed their methods for staying relevant:

I really try to see . . . I try to keep my eyes open to what our kids are watching, what are they doing? I like subscribing to blogs of everything from other children's ministry leaders to new in general about stuff relating to kids and culture just to see what is it that they're...what are their interests, what movies are out, what are the video games kids are playing, what are they doing, what trends are they involved in? (Interview G)

Yeah, go to the mall or go to Toys R Us. Seriously [sic] . With my kids or without them, not to see what's in the store, but to see the kid that is in the store. Watching who my kids play with . . . they're playing mostly with believer kids because we control that, but watching the kids in my neighborhood. I think it's more observation. I think we need to as a whole be more observant rather than just starting stuff to start stuff. I think we need to pare back programs and start watching more to figure out what is the best use of time of the children's pastor, director in the local church. For me, it has to do with observation, it has to do with watching the 750 cable channels. (Interview B)

In my ministry one of the things is that I will tell my teachers and parents and especially the teachers that don't have school age children, walk through the toy section, walk through the kids' clothing section and look at how the clothes are becoming less modest than what we would want them to be and look at the toys and what are they designed to do and where is the imagination for some of the kids. The toys that they are producing and things like that but I think that it is time that we have got to know what happens Monday through Saturday in that kid's life. Because there are six days that comes into that classroom on Sunday morning and I think sometimes we live in that society where in Sunday School all we are doing is teaching them the Bible but we have to take that and put it back into Monday through Saturday and we also have to Monday through Saturday and apply it to the Bible story. So we have to stay current with what's happening. (Interview P2)

Religious Tradition and Culturally Relevant Methodology

The discovery of the contributors' views of religious traditions in spite of culturally relevant methods was an important concept in order to understand the attitudes and assumptions of the contributors. With all of the intention and determination of the contributors to be relevant in their methodology with children, they identified a few religious traditions that were considered essential, whether they were culturally relevant or not. These religious traditions included a range of activities and spiritual disciplines

such as a heavy emphasis on prayer and various prayer activities, liturgical practices, Bible intake and teaching, service opportunities, evangelism, and keeping a spiritual journal. One contributor in particular was a good example of the acknowledged need for religious traditions:

Prayer, I think prayer is essential. Teaching kids about reflection, being quiet. You know, God wants us sometimes just to be still and be quiet and listen to His still small voice. I think a third point would be kids need to know the stories of the Bible, kids seem to connect with stories and I have always thought that if you can teach kids the stories, God can use those stories as they grow older and the principles and the truths that come from those stories will become a reality in their life and they will begin to see them. A fourth point, kids need to know their way around the Scripture. They need to know there is a New and an Old Testament and kind of have a feel for their way around God's Word. The fifth point and my last would probably be the ordinances of the church whether baptism or the Lord's Table that those are essentials. (Interview D)

Research Question 4

Which, if any, classical ministry methods for children are considered by the contributors to be ineffective due to their lack of cultural relevance for a postmodern culture?

The contributors did not reference many methods that might be considered classical ministry methods for children, although there were some issues that were of concern for them. The research instrument did not ask a specific question concerning classical ministry methods but each section of questions was open ended and provided opportunity for the contributors to describe their methodology. A few of the contributors did describe or reference classical ministry methodology, but most of those references suggested a need to move away from classic ministry methods as a result of the effort to be culturally relevant. One exception to this was seen in Interview P2 as the contributor

identified missions education as an element of children's ministry that should not be overlooked.

This move away from classic methodology was coded primarily in the relationship where attitudes of cultural relevancy moved away from classic methods. Two of the more distinct references that reflect the desire to move away from classic children's methodology were provided here:

We're still doing children's choir and missions and we're still calling Sunday School, Sunday School. The word doesn't even make sense. It's worse than Saturday School. We're still in the 60's, maybe the 70's. We're not speaking a child's language. A child is being entertained and wired all week electronically and technologically and they walk in to this wonderful flannel graph presentation and they kind of melt down. (Interview I)

You've got to have the relationship but you also have to stay current with technology. If you are using flannel graph with 6th grade in the United States you have a problem. Flannel graph, when that came out, was touted as (unintelligible). Now we look at it as a little bit antiquated. Now people are looking at video and going well...it's what flannel was 40 years ago. As you start opening up I-Pods and other technical ways to deliver information, then all those are going to come under scrutiny as well. I think we have to keep up with the times or we are going to be irrelevant. (Interview J)

Research Question 5

Which, if any, postmodern ministry methods for children are considered by the contributors to be ineffective due to their lack of biblical correctness or developmental appropriateness?

The limited nature of the responses and uncertainty expressed by the contributors concerning postmodernism was an unexpected find on the part of the researcher. Most of the contributors responded to the concept of postmodernism with not more than a general impression of what it was and how it may or may not have impacted

children's ministry, and some offered almost no response at all. Even with that unanticipated response, some of the contributors still made an effort to address the issues of methodology, theology, and epistemology from their individual perspectives. A specific answer to research question five was not readily available because of the responses provided by the contributors, but there were some indirect answers provided that may provide insight into the contributors' views.

The main insight into the contributors' concern for postmodernism was the concern for the integrity of theological truth. While there was uncertainty about the meaning of postmodernism, some of the contributors recognized the postmodern trend of relative or constructivist truth and the conflict that trend has with the presupposition of absolute truth. Three of the more striking observations of the implication of this trend from contributors were comparable:

One of the big cultural shifts is this generation if you will is just the incredibly high number of divorces that take place. And so there's all these broken homes with kids who have a couple of parents maybe only one living at home, maybe they jockey between two houses and all that. The cultural shift has been towards saying that divorce is okay and that kids can weather through that. I think the church and children's ministries can look at that and say no divorce actually you know will impact kids negatively but how can we use the shift towards a more socially acceptable divorce reality and look at that and say how can we use that as an opportunity to share with kids about the never changing, always present love of God. and looking at them and just saying this is an opportunity to point kids towards God rather than oh my gosh there's a cultural shift that's evil, it's this, it's this. Where sin abounds grace abounds even more. (Interview K)

I think that postmodernism has swept Western culture, it dominates Western culture, and thus it ultimately influences the way that we even think here in America. I am sure you are aware of the research that has been done in recent years to point out the fact that when it comes to the divorce rate its really no different between the Christian realm in America and the non-Christian. (Interview F)

What are the issues that kids are dealing with? Such as, you know, we've got broken families and so many kids are from broken homes and there's not this

consistency, the stability at home, how do you take that into consideration? There's so many more issues that kids deal with nowadays. They sometimes cloud their understanding of God or you may say, God's a loving Father . . . they see their dad once a month. Or what type of an image does that put in their mind of how God treats them. The issues like that because of how our society has fallen in a way, these are things that we need to deal with. (Interview G)

In light of the problems caused by postmodernism, the contributors emphasized the need for theological teaching:

The other point, number two would be kids need doctrine and as a children's minister or pastor, I need to make sure that I am using curriculum that grounds kids in the truth, that teaches them biblical doctrine and I see another good thing to do if it is not a part of your regular curriculum is to make it part of your regular curriculum is to just teach world view on a regular basis. There is truth and He is a God and He is a judge and we are going to stand before Him one day and just really drive that in during those formative years. (Interview C)

Absolutely, because every kid knows that God is creator. I dare you to find a kid 10 years and under that doesn't know that God made him. I dare you to find a kid 18 years old that hasn't had serious thoughts about wondering if Genesis is true. Something happens between childhood and 21 that seeks to undermine the validity of the scriptures in this nice form of well, scientists believe. (Interview L2)

Out of familiar concern, another contributor identified the need for theological teaching with children also, but the teaching methodology was as much of a concern as the contributor expressed a distrust for current developmental theory which encourages the learner to create his own meanings:

A lot of theorists now that are talking of moving away from the old instructivists models where I'm the teacher and I have to impart all of this knowledge to kids. I think it's easy to go overboard in one direction and to make it all experiential you know there are certain truths that are going to be the same today, yesterday, today, and forever that I think there is a place, I think theology would be a place for that, an instructor expert to share experiences and ways of application. I think modern child development theory in some ways kind of scrapes off little of that by saying that's not quite as important that the most important thing is that they are constructing their own understanding. So I think you need balance. I think balance is important. (Interview G)

Evaluation of Research Design

The qualitative methodology of this study has proven to be beneficial to the researcher in the attempt to investigate the attitudes and assumptions of contributors to children's ministry towards cultural relevancy. The research instrument allowed the researcher to encourage and to guide contributors to children's ministry to discuss their views concerning the relevant issues among the five sections of the interview questions. The organization of the research questions also allowed each interview to take a more conversational approach which possibly enabled the contributors to reflect on their views more personably and more freely. This was essential to the grounded theory approach of the study and the need for rich, textual descriptions to convey the context of the interview responses and their deeper meaning (Patton 2002, 503)

The study has been subject to obstacles that should be addressed. The first and foremost concern with the research design is the same as the primary benefit, the grounded theory design. The challenge and possible weakness was the reliance on the interpretation of the researcher in the coding process. While the researcher intended to provide no more than a description of what was said by the contributors, the coding process requires the researcher to evaluate the contextual meaning of the contributor's comments and interpret their meaning or intent to some degree (Patton 2002, 503). Consistency in the coding process was affirmed to a large degree with the comparison of coding percentages of the categories from both interview groups.

Another weakness of the design occurred during the interview process as the researcher conducted each interview. The contributors, with varied backgrounds and professional ministry experiences, responded to the interview questions with varying

degrees of thoroughness. Most of the contributors remained focused, answering the questions by utilizing the interview questions provided by the researcher in advance of the appointment. Other contributors may have been too brief in their responses to gain the nuances of their attitudes and assumptions, but others gave such extensive explanations and analogies that it was more challenging to identify references for coding at the appropriate nodes in the *NVivo* software.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to determine whether or not there were commonalities and differences among the perspectives of recognized contributors to children's ministry in relation to cultural relevancy as a determining factor in ministry and the postmodern cultural shift. The purpose of this chapter in particular was to synthesize the analyzed data into terms that will allow leaders in the local church to give greater consideration of the theological and educational premises of recognized contributors to children's ministry.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this descriptive study was to determine commonalities and differences in the theology of children and the attitudes towards cultural relevancy of recognized contributors in children's ministry as determining factors of philosophy and models for ministry with children in local congregations. The descriptive nature of this research revealed findings that should allow those involved with children's ministry in local congregations to understand the presuppositions and assumptions of the recognized contributors. In turn, this study should create a greater understanding of the ministry

methods that these contributors propose in their publications, resources, and ministries on both a local and national level.

This study employed elements of both phenomenological and grounded theory methods that allowed the researcher to observe and examine the trends in children's ministry towards being more culturally relevant. Many recognized contributors were sought for participation in the study, and 16 contributors granted interviews to the researcher. These contributors participated in one of two groups. The first group consisted of telephone interviews with 11 of the contributors, and the second group included 5 contributors who granted in person interviews. The recognized contributors included individuals that have made some type of contribution to children's ministry through publications, conferences, or media resources.

The researcher designed an instrument consisting of relevant interview questions which were reviewed by an expert panel. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis, and the researcher utilized *NVivo*, a content analysis software, to assist in the data collection and analysis. The contents of each interview were analyzed as the researcher studied them and identified appropriate references in each interview. These references resulted in categories that the researcher used as a framework for describing the attitudes and assumptions of contributors to children's ministry.

Research Questions

1. What are the dominant attitudes towards the role of cultural relevancy in children's ministry of recognized contributors to children's ministry?
2. What are the dominant theological presuppositions concerning children and children's ministry of those that have made recognized contributions to this field?

3. What are the common themes among the theology and attitudes expressed by the contributing leaders towards cultural relevancy as a determining factor in children's ministry methodology?
4. Which, if any, traditional ministry methods for children are considered by the contributors to be ineffective due to their lack of cultural relevance for a postmodern culture?
5. Which, if any, postmodern ministry methods for children are considered by the contributors to be ineffective due to their lack of biblical correctness or developmental appropriateness?

Cultural Relevancy Attitudes

The first research question asked, "What are the dominant attitudes towards the role of cultural relevancy of recognized contributors to children's ministry?" The attitudes of the contributors were identified through the content analysis including *a priori*, emergent, and relationship categories.

Passionate to Be Relevant

The contributors to children's ministry were passionate about the role of cultural relevancy. In the coding process, cultural relevancy was the third highest rated *a priori* category, demonstrating a lot of discussion related to this issue within the interviews. All of the contributors described an affirmative need to be a culturally relevant in children's ministry. All contributors expressed some aspect of a biblical premise for the desire to be culturally relevant as seen in Interview K:

I think cultural relevancy to us in my mind is what aspects of culture can you refer to give kids a belief that the message you're sending them is relevant and not stuck in the Bible but's relevant to today and I don't think you can actually take the concepts from the Bible and apply them to today without showing their relevancy and the culture is just the vehicle with which you show relevancy. But it's cultural references more than it is cultural immersion. (Interview K)

The biblical basis for cultural relevancy was particularly visible in the relationship categories such as apologetics of cultural relevancy where references included attempts by the contributors to describe a biblical and personal basis for cultural relevancy in children's ministry.

Conclusion

From the vantage point of the contributors, cultural relevancy was a factor in children's ministry that was essential. They viewed the need to be relevant as essential in order to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ to children while being appealing both to their parents and the children themselves. Cultural relevancy was also a means of demonstrating to children and their parents the care and concern of the contributor and the church because time was taken to understand their cultural context.

Dominant Theological Presuppositions

The second research question asked, "What are the dominant theological presuppositions concerning children and children's ministry of those that have made recognized contributions to this field?" Theological presuppositions were prevalent in the interview content and those presuppositions were discovered to be influential in the design of the contributors' ministries. The discovery was made through the coding process which revealed the *a priori*, emergent, and relationship categories. References to theology of children as an initial category were very frequent, especially with the combined coding of all associated issues and relationships. This was a bit of a surprise to the researcher who anticipated a far greater emphasis on cultural relevancy and pragmatic methodology, but the coding rate was much more balanced.

The dominant theological presuppositions discovered included the beliefs of the contributors that children are sinful and are in need of Jesus to save them. They should be baptized by immersion once they have demonstrated cognition of spiritual conversion, and their parents have affirmed the faith of the child as well. The contributors, throughout the interviews, explained how their conviction to see children become believers shaped their ministries. Additionally, the rediscovery of the role of parents was recognized as a dominant presupposition and one for which the contributors expressed great concern. Some of the contributors described action steps that were utilized in ministry to help parents, and some were still discovering the importance of the parental role and how to equip parents to accept that role.

Conclusion

By the admission of the contributors and observations of the researcher, theological issues were recognized as the foundational factors for their ministry development and methodology. This was an important discovery because it demonstrated the theological basis for what the participating contributors wrote, taught, and produced for the benefit of local churches and their ministries to children. While the generalizations of this study were limited to a large degree, it was encouraging for the researcher to see such grounded theological presuppositions expressed by the contributors, and they should strengthen the confidence among local children's ministry personnel concerning some of what is being published, produced, or espoused in conferences concerning the need to be culturally relevant.

Theology, Relevance, and Methodology

The third research question asked, "What are the common themes among the theology and attitudes expressed by the contributing leaders towards cultural relevancy as a determining factor in children's ministry methodology?" The findings that answer this question were synthesized from the coding of the categories identified in the interview content. Several categories revealed the interconnectedness of theology, methodology, and cultural relevancy. They included those three categories plus issues of media, postmodernism in children's ministry, religious traditions, parental responsibility, apologetic of cultural relevancy, developmentalism, and classic children's ministry methodology. These categories and their relationships indicated that the contributors placed the most value on theological concerns as a determining factor for methodology in children's ministry, but they also indicated an almost equal emphasis on cultural relevance as a determining factor for methodology.

Conclusion

The dichotomy of theological issues and cultural relevancy issues was not contradictory, but mutually dependent, according to the responses provided by the contributors. The contributors' methodology for ministry was clearly driven by theological issues such a child's need for salvation, baptism, spiritual nurturing, and others as they discussed the priority of reaching children and their families. Congruently, the need to be appealing to children through relevancy was virtually an equal concern. The duality is understandable as the contributors desired to reach children but to do so in a way that was familiar so that children could understand. This was accomplished by the

contributors through trends in technology, creative facilities, limited but intentional programming, and developmentally appropriate curriculum.

Classic Methods

The fourth research question asked, “Which, if any, classic ministry methods for children are considered by the contributors to be ineffective due to their lack of cultural relevance for a postmodern culture?” The researcher identified classic children’s methodology as an emergent category in the structure of coding, but it proved to be a rather limited category to code.

There were some references to classic children’s methods by the contributors, and those references did reveal more about their attitudes of cultural relevancy. Based on the definition of classic methods provided in chapter one, the references coded at classic children’s methodology included a few main issues such as Sunday School, AWANA, Vacation Bible School, mission education, children’s choirs, puppets, and flannel graph. All of these topics when referenced were spoken of with both affection and concern, but there was an antagonism among the contributors about some of these issues because of their lack of contextual or cultural relevance.

Conclusion

The negative connotations were expressed because the contributors were concerned about being culturally relevant, although they expressed an appreciation for the intention of the referenced programs and their use in the church over the years. With the daily advent of new media technology, flannel graph as a visual was recognized as quite irrelevant. Programs such as Sunday School and AWANA were spoken of fondly but

with the warning that they must be kept relevant to the life contexts of children. The concerns about this issue from the contributors may not have been so much about the specific programs as it was about the manner in which the programs were used. Insight from Interview B revealed concerns for “a shelf life” for any program as the contributor discussed the national status of the ministry the contributor developed:

I think where models can hurt us and I speak for [the contributor’s ministry] and what I spent 13 years building there is you raise the bar of children’s ministry so high that you discourage those that are watching because the reality is there are only 4 or 5 [ministries like the contributor’s]. I think to put somebody up on a pedestal and as I find out more that I am out of that now, and realize that people have this ministry pedestal . . . here’s what I am wondering. Did I create a service or a disservice to those folks? Simply doing ministry with someone else at a higher level is not what it is. Everything has a shelf life. (Interview B)

Ineffective Postmodern Methods

The fifth research question asked, “Which, if any, postmodern ministry methods for children are considered by the contributors to be ineffective due to their lack of biblical correctness or developmental appropriateness?” The answer to this question requires another less obvious answer due to the limited nature of the responses provided by the contributors. The category of postmodernism in children’s ministry seemed to be as uncertain as the one concerning developmental appropriateness. The lower rate of coding was most likely the result of uncertainty expressed by some of the contributors as to the meaning of the term postmodernism or a more academic understanding of developmentalism.

Postmodern Methods

The difficulty of identifying postmodern ministry methods and the attitudes of

the contributors towards those methods resulted in the lack of certainty the contributors expressed when discussing postmodernism. They made comments such as, “I must admit I have not done as much study on this as I should, maybe.” (Interview E), and “I am a postmodern idiot. I’ve never taken the time to really look at it and dissect it.” (Interview B) Other contributors offered a bit more of an explanation despite their uncertainty, “I really am not familiar with this. I guess what I am thinking is new trends. The way people change things. They come up with their own truth and follow that rather than staying with the what the Bible says. I’m not really sure if that is what that means” (Interview O2). The contributors attempted to express some concern when responding to postmodern trends in children’s ministry, and those comments expressed concern for biblical truth in contrast to the postmodern rejection of absolute truth.

Developmental Appropriateness

The contributors discussed their views of developmentalism as well, but their responses were often limited similarly to that of postmodernism in children’s ministry. Concerns for developmental appropriateness were observed by the researcher as practical issues which included an awareness of cognitive development differences by age, communicating with children in a way they can understand, and the comparison of spiritual development to the physical development of children. Interview E offered a representative example of the views expressed by the contributors:

I’ve studied and I have a lot of books and pamphlets that show how the developmental stages of children and I make sure that whoever’s working with X, Y, Z group is familiar with how that particular group functions and how they learn and how they grow. I encourage our 4th and 5th grade teachers . . . obviously they don’t approach things the same way that our nursery does. And that’s because of the developmental stages. We are very intentional that everything is age appropriate

and that the language, the tools, and the activities that they are doing are age appropriate and are going to help them learn based on their developmental stage. (Interview E)

Conclusion

The synthesis of these two categories to answer the research question is problematic because there were few, if any, postmodern children's ministry methods suggested by the contributors except where they identified them as biblically based responses to postmodernism. Only one developmental concern in relation to postmodernism was identified by a contributor in Interview G, and that was a concern for trends in child development theory to be more child centered, allowing for constructed meaning in educational methodology:

A lot of theorists now that are talking of moving away from the old instructivists models where I'm the teacher and I have to impart all of this knowledge to kids. I think it's easy to go overboard in one direction and to make it all experiential, you know there are certain truths that are going to be the same yesterday, today, and forever. I think there is a place, I think theology would be a place for that, an instructor expert to share experiences and ways of application. I think modern child development theory in some ways kind of scrapes off little of that by saying that's not quite as important that the most important thing is that they are constructing their own understanding. So I think you need balance. I think balance is important. (Interview G)

Ultimately, the researcher discovered that the contributors were committed to implementing only biblically based methods and programming that were developmentally appropriate for children.

Research Implications

The research findings primarily were affirming to the work that is occurring in children's ministry today because of the efforts to reach children with every means

necessary. The contributors were excited and passionate about their individual ministries as well as what they saw happening in other children's ministries:

Environment is a huge thing right now so a lot of churches are spending millions on creating these learning environments for children that are inviting and I am all for that. If I a member of a church that has those kind of resources and make your church friendly and fun and inviting for kids, then I am all for that but the danger side is that often they have all the packaging but if you ask about how are kids being discipled and how are parents being equipped, (unintelligible) teaching and let that be a motivation for "what are we supposed to be doing." (Interview D)

The most affirming comment may have come from Interview B:

I think in terms of methodology we can use what is available to us in our culture today and say this is what we need to do. You know what I think is really great . . . I think the church gets a lot of flack for not doing it that way, but for crying out loud I think the church is doing great. I really do. There are some . . . but I think that as a whole I think the church has really been creative in the last 5 to 10 years on what are we doing to make a difference. I see that even in children's ministry. I go to churches now that I'm telling you what . . . it's not your momma's children's church. It's not your parent's children's church anymore. It's not your parent's children's ministry anymore. There are some people that are doing some radically cool stuff. They may not be getting known for it, but they're getting it done. I'm very positive in terms of what the churches are doing out there in terms of the programs starting in the parking lot by drawing kids into the building, making them more aware. Not taking themselves too seriously, willing to risk and try some things. That's just a blessing. I think it is truly a good time in children's ministry in church. (Interview B)

A second research implication is the recognized need for improvements in children's ministry methodology. The general attitude towards cultural relevancy was very positive. Some of the contributors expressed either a need for increased application of culturally relevant methodology, or in contrast, to be more balanced biblically in relation to culturally relevant methods. In Interview I the contributor expressed both a need for the church to be more relevant and developmentally appropriate:

I'm all about being contemporary. It means being attractive, you're speaking that language. Churches are like Germans trying to teach French people to speak Spanish. We have adults that speak a language that other adults understand but we

try to teach children that same language and they are in a different language. It's time for the church to develop a childhood development and more than what the seminary has been doing. (Interview I)

Concerns for balance were seen in the comments offered in Interview A and P2:

I think the next thing that is biblically motivated, if we are really about leading kids to Christ, you need to be able to point to the calendar and see how many times a year you are giving an opportunity for kids to accept Christ. You can keep that kid coming to church and having a blast and hearing about God, Jesus and the Bible and you never actually harvest. So you want to make sure that you have opportunities where you actually share the Gospel and give kids a chance to respond and how they define that is up to them. (Interview A)

Bible study I think is one that has to be more than fluff. The new term "edutainment" in that you've got to entertain me to educate me. I struggle with that because I have been to so many different churches around the country who are redesigning their children's ministry to look like the Disney world with the animated animals and all that kind of stuff, and my thinking is if I lived in Orlando and I went to Disney World every week, how long before that all of a sudden doesn't appeal to me anymore. Then what's next? I think we have got to balance the education with the fun. It has got to be fun, it has got to be appealing but it has got to be Biblically based and Biblically sound. (Interview P2).

Further Research

The research study into the attitudes and assumptions of contributors to children's ministry revealed several future research opportunities. The discovery of the desire among the contributors to lead the church to involve parents more in children's ministry and for parents to assume primary responsibility for the spiritual nurturing of their children should be considered for additional research. Methods for leading parents or churches to accept their appropriate, biblical responsibilities should be investigated as well as what churches and parents that have achieved this are doing already.

Another possibility for future research would be a quantitative study following a similar research instrument but with quantifiable responses as the research outcome.

Investigating local children's pastors concerning their attitudes and assumptions concerning cultural relevancy would provide additional information for the cultural relevancy phenomenon that seems to be influencing methodology in children's ministry today. Based on emergent themes that were discovered in this research endeavor, further study of children's pastors might investigate the influences of their education whether secular or faith based as well as the influence of mentors in their lives.

APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS WITH CHILDREN'S MINISTRY CONTRIBUTORS

These questions were utilized to interview children's ministry experts who made recognized contributors to children's ministry. While each specific question was asked at every interview, some exploration of related issues occurred where a contributor addressed issues of importance from their perspective but were not directly related to one of the interview questions.

QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS WITH CHILDREN'S MINISTRY CONTRIBUTORS

Section 1: Personal Background

1. Describe your call to the ministry and the major events that led to your decision to serve in some capacity in children's ministry.
2. Describe your theological and ministry praxis education or training experiences.
3. What is your current vision for your contribution to children's ministry as you influence many children's leaders in local congregations?

Section 2: Theological and Philosophical Presuppositions

1. Based on your education in theology and philosophy what is your understanding of the Bible's description and commands concerning children?
2. How do you feel your biblical understanding of children has shaped your ministry to children and your contributions to children's ministry on a national level?
3. What are some specific elements of children's ministry that you believe must happen because of a biblical admonition?
4. What are the specific concerns for the contemporary church to reflect biblical principles for children's ministry?
5. Describe your perspective on childhood conversion and how you suggest designing children's ministry accordingly?

Section 3: Developmentalism

1. Based on your educational assumptions, how would you describe the development of a child?
2. What ways have you applied principles of child development in your ministry to children and in your influence with leaders in the local church?
3. What ways have you chosen to minister with children that contradict child development principles or in your influence with leaders in the local church?
4. How has child development theory helped children's ministry in your opinion?

5. How has child development theory hindered children's ministry in your opinion?

Section 4: The Relationship between Cultural Relevancy and Religious Traditions

1. Describe your understanding of the concept of cultural relevancy?
2. To what extent do you or should churches design children's ministry to be culturally relevant?
3. What steps have you taken intentionally to be culturally relevant in your ministry with children?
4. How would you describe children's ministry models that are effective in the local church?
5. What religious traditions do you believe are essential to children's ministry regardless of cultural relevancy?

Section 5: Postmodernism

1. What is your perspective of the concept of postmodernity in western culture?
2. How should the church adapt children's ministry in response to postmodernism?
3. What should the church's response be to the significant influence of media as a primary means of communication in the church?

APPENDIX 2

EVALUATION FORM FOR THE REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

This instruction page, survey, and evaluation guide were mailed to the members of an expert panel in addition to the research instrument. The expert panel reviewed the following summary of the research concern as originally provided in the prospectus and then evaluated the primary draft of the interview questions. A form intended as a guide for the evaluation of the survey was provided so the members of the panel could provide feedback in a simple and organized manner.

Evaluation Form for Interview Questions for the Prospectus:
*An Investigation into the Attitudes and Assumptions
of Contributors to Children's Ministry
towards Cultural Relevancy.*
Christopher L. Harding, Researcher

Instructions: Please read the attached summary of the proposed research and the interview questions intended to be used with individuals that have made recognized contributions to children's ministry. Once you have read the attached information, please provide a written response to the following questions. Your insight will be carefully considered and used to improve the quality and reliability of this study. Upon completion of the research, a summary of the finding will be sent to you in appreciation for the time you invested in the ministry with children.

Question 1

To what extent are the interview questions appropriate for the purpose of this research proposal? Which questions if any should be eliminated? Are there questions or issues that should be asked that are not listed in the questionnaire?

Questions 2

To what extent are the interview questions clear and understandable? If not, which questions should be reconsidered and why? Are the questions designed in such a way as to encourage children's ministry contributors to give reflective thought within the five categories?

Question 3

To what extent are the questions relevant to the field of children's ministry and the intent of the proposed research? Which questions, if any, do not seem relevant to children's ministry or the purpose of understanding theological presuppositions and educational assumptions of children's ministry contributors?

Summary of Evaluation

Please provide any further comments concerning the interview questions that you think might be helpful to the researcher and improve the potential findings of this study.

Research Synopsis

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE ATTITUDES AND ASSUMPTIONS OF CONTRIBUTORS TO CHILDREN'S MINISTRY TOWARDS CULTURAL RELEVANCY

Introduction to the Research Problem

Over the last few years, trends in methodology of children's ministry have been rooted in educational assumptions (Ratcliff 2000, 66). It is not unreasonable to connect much of children's ministry methods and design with the developmentalist influences of Piaget, Erickson, and Fowler if Ratcliff's observations of a superimposed school culture over church ministry are accurate (Shields and Bredfeldt 2001; Ratcliff 2000, 67).

With the discussions concerning methodologies for effective children's ministry, some of those methodological approaches conflict with one another. Despite these contradictions, it is reasonable to assume that most of the significant children's leadership proposing ministry methods are doing so based on their theological presuppositions and sociological assumptions. These presuppositions and assumptions must be reconsidered in order to find the more effective means of reaching children and preventing "typical school methods and perspectives [which] may produce an overarching, oppressive, rule-centered environment," (Ratcliff 2000, 67).

An Example of Conflicting Methods

Understanding the presuppositions and assumptions of significant children's ministry contributors should provide helpful understanding and subsequent meaning of the methods that leaders propose, especially when ministry methods conflict. Both Reggie Joiner and Ivy Beckwith desire to reach children in the postmodern culture and propose methods to do that, but their methods are significantly different in their approaches (Beckwith 2004; Stanley, Joiner, and Jones 2004). Joiner has taken the approach to the ministry of reaching children with the gospel through large theatrical productions that reflect the popular culture of children's entertainment (Stanley, Joiner, and Jones 2004, 111). Beckwith, who seems to be critical of such entertainment oriented programming, promotes discipleship of children through their inclusion in churches' adult worship (Beckwith 2004, 149).

The distinction between the two methodologies described above is most likely a reflection of their theological presuppositions and educational assumptions concerning the biblical and sociological identity of children. When local children's pastors consider adopting or rejecting the many proposed methods they may encounter through books, magazines, journals, conferences, and other means, they need to consider what the presuppositions and assumptions of the contributors are in order to evaluate the potential effectiveness of the suggested method as well as its theological correctness.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this descriptive, phenomenological study is to determine commonalities and differences in the theology of children and the attitudes towards cultural relevancy of recognized contributors in children's ministry as determining factors

of philosophy and models for ministry with children in local congregations. The descriptive nature of this research should reveal findings that will allow those involved with children's ministry in local congregations to understand the presuppositions and assumptions of the recognized contributors and, in turn, create a greater understanding of the ministry methods that these contributors propose.

Research Questions

Upon an examination of the information collected through extensive interviews with leaders in children's ministry as well as a content analysis of their recognized contributions, answers to the following research questions will be sought:

1. What are the dominant attitudes towards the role of cultural relevancy in children's ministry of recognized contributors to children's ministry?
2. What are the dominant theological presuppositions concerning children and children's ministry of those that have made recognized contributions to this field?
3. What are the common themes among the theology and attitudes expressed by the contributing leaders towards cultural relevancy as a determining factor in children's ministry methodology?
4. Which, if any, traditional ministry methods for children are considered by the contributors to be ineffective due to their lack of cultural relevance for a postmodern culture?
5. Which, if any, postmodern ministry methods for children are considered by the contributors to be ineffective due to their lack of biblical correctness or developmental appropriateness?

Terminology

Culture. The characteristics, rules, values, and beliefs of a particular social group which may be identified by any number of commonalities such as ethnicity, language, gender, age, etc.

Cultural relevancy. For the purpose of this research, this term refers to the need to communicate truth through methods that are understandable and meaningful to the target audience. It is not to be confused with concerns for cultural diversity or pluralism, but rather to communicate with an awareness of unique distinctives within a given culture, in this case children. As Sullivan explains the concept, "If something makes sense, it is culturally relevant. A lack of cultural relevancy can result in a person feeling like they are out of their element and do not know the rules or expectations," (Sullivan 2003).

Developmentalism. The broad educational assumption that individuals grow and mature through a series of stages or processes that can be identified through scientific observation. This encompasses the cognitive, emotional, moral, and spiritual growth of individuals. Each of these areas of development have significant theorists and proponents that have influenced educational thought.

Postmodernity. This is the identified shift in the current culture which has been marked by a relativistic understanding of truth and a tendency to question absolute truth. This is also accompanied by a rejection of religious traditions in exchange for a desire for deeper spirituality (Kimball 2003, 41). Johnston actually warns that “postmodernism is better understood descriptively and by its features, rather than by definition,” (Johnston 2001, 24).

Theological presuppositions. These are basic statements of someone’s understanding of theology. For this study, attention will be given to the theological presuppositions about children and children’s ministry.

Classical Children’s Ministry. This is a broad concept that encompasses many children’s ministry methods. It will be used in this paper to describe methods of reaching and ministering to children that have been widely implemented in the church over the last several years and are revered for their longevity but not necessarily for their effectiveness.

PRIMARY DRAFT OF RESEARCH INSTRUMENT
Questions for Interviews with Children's
Ministry Contributors

Section 1: Personal Background

1. Briefly describe your personal, childhood spiritual development and education.
2. Describe your call to ministry and the major events that led to your decision to serve in some capacity in children's ministry.
3. Describe your theological training and ministry praxis education or training experiences.
4. What is your current vision for your contribution to children's ministry as you influence many children's leaders in local congregations?

Section 2: Theological and Philosophical Presuppositions

1. Based on your education in theology and philosophy what is your understanding of the Bible's descriptions and commands concerning children in the following areas:
 - a. Sin Nature of Children
 - b. Salvation of Children
 - c. Baptism of Children
 - d. Spiritual Nurturing of Children
 - e. Parental Responsibility for Children
 - f. Church/Community Responsibility for Children
 - g. Culture Influence and Children
2. How do you feel your biblical understanding of children has shaped your ministry to children and your contributions to children's ministry on a national level?
3. What are the specific elements of children's ministry that you believe must happen because of a biblical admonition?

4. What are the specific concerns for the contemporary church to reflect biblical principles for children's ministry based on your theological paradigm?
5. Based on your perspective of childhood spiritual development and/or conversion, how do you suggest churches develop their ministry to children?

Section 3: Developmentalism

1. Based on your educational assumptions, how would you describe the development of a child?
2. In what ways have you applied principles of childhood development in your ministry to children and in your influence with leaders in the local church?
3. In what ways have you chosen to minister with children or influence leaders within the local church that contradict childhood development principles?
4. How has childhood development theory helped children's ministry in your opinion?
5. How has childhood development theory hindered children's ministry in your opinion?

Section 4: The Relationship between Cultural Relevancy and Religious Traditions

1. Describe your understanding of the concept of cultural relevancy.
2. To what extent do you think churches should design children's ministry to be culturally relevant?
3. What steps have you taken intentionally to be culturally relevant in your ministry with children?
4. How would you describe children's ministry models that are effective in the local church?
5. What religious traditions do you believe are essential to children's ministry regardless of cultural relevancy?

Section 5: Postmodernism

1. What is your perspective of the concept of postmodernity in western culture particularly in relation to the church?

2. How should the church adapt children's ministry in response to postmodernism?
3. What should the church's response be to the significant influence of media as a primary means of communication in the church?

APPENDIX 3

DATA COLLECTION SURVEY

The data collection schedule provided is to display the length of time involved in scheduling and conducting the field research. The field research consisted of telephone interviews with contributors to children's ministry and in person interviews with additional contributors to children's ministry.

Data Collection Schedule

Interview	Scheduled Time	Date
K	10:00am EST	September 14, 2007
E	3:00pm EST	September 19, 2007
A	11:00am EST	October 3, 2007
F	11:00am EST	October 4, 2007
G	12:00pm EST	October 11, 2007
C	3:00pm EST	October 18, 2007
H	4:30pm EST	November 1, 2007
I	9:00am EST	November 11, 2007
B	1:00pm EST	November 13, 2007
D	3:00pm EST	November 13, 2007
J	12:00pm EST	December 5, 2007
P2	10:00pm EST	March 27, 2008
M2	2:00pm EST	March 27, 2008
L2	3:30pm EST	March 27, 2008
N2	10:00am EST	March 28, 2008
O2	10:00am EST	April 1, 2008

APPENDIX 4

RESEARCH PROCESS

The research process is provided in the following table for the purpose of giving a visual perspective of the steps taken to accomplish the research.

Research Process

Mail Interview Requests	Means	Date
First Mailing to Schedule Interviews	Formal Letter or Email	August 17 - 25, 2007
Confirmation of Receipt of Letter & Schedule Appointment	Telephone Call or Email as appropriate	September - October 2007
Round 1 Interviews	By Telephone	September - December 2007
Transcription of Interviews	Researcher	Upon Completion of Interviews
Round 2 Interviews	In Person	March - April 2008
Transcription of Interviews	Researcher	Upon Completion of Interviews
Thank You Letters	Formal Letter	February-April 2008

APPENDIX 5

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

When conducting interviews with the contributors to children's ministry, anonymity was provided by not associating the names of the experts with their specific opinions. To provide further validity to the research findings, a list of contributors by name has been provided but still without connecting the contributors to their views as quoted throughout the dissertation.

Lists of Contributors

Karl Bastian

Todd Capps

Brian Dollar

Anita Edlund

Jack Eggar

Ryan Frank

Trisha Graves

Keith Johnson

Craig Jutila

Art Murphy

Jason Rhode

Alan Root Robinson

Larry Shallenberger

David Staal

Jean Thomason

Kai Vilhelmsen

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ABSTRACT

ATTITUDES AND ASSUMPTIONS CONTRIBUTORS TO CHILDREN'S MINISTRY TOWARDS CULTURAL RELEVANCY

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008
Chairperson: Dr. Brian C. Richardson

Contributors to children's ministry produce many resources that are consumed by local congregations, determining the direction of their evangelism and discipleship with children. Chapter 1 describes the purpose of this research which was to investigate the attitudes and assumptions of significant contributors to children's ministry towards cultural relevancy as a determining factor for ministry development.

Chapter 2 addresses the theological, historical, and educational bases for children's ministry. This chapter also gives attention to the current trends in children's ministry philosophy and methodology.

Chapter 3 provides a description of the research design and experience. The qualitative process is described as well as the data collection and analysis of the interview process.

Chapter 4 describes the findings from the data collection. Specific attention is given to the categories discovered while utilizing elements of the grounded theory approach to research.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the conclusions drawn from the findings in response to the research questions. General findings included a strong theological

foundation and a passionate desire to be culturally relevant as motivators for the work of the recognized contributors to children's ministry.

ministry

KEY WORDS: Children's ministry
Theology of children
Developmentalism
Culture
Postmodernism
Church and Children

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